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THE

LOVELS OF ARDEN

A Novel

75426

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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THE LOVELS OF ARDEN.

CHAPTER I.

COMING HOME.

THE lamps of the Great Northern Terminus at King's Cross had not long been lighted, when a cab deposited a young lady and her luggage at the departure platform. It was an October twilight, cold and gray, and the place had a cheerless and dismal aspect to that solitary young traveller, to whom English life and an English atmosphere were somewhat strange.

She had been seven years abroad, in a school near Paris; rather an expensive seminary, where the number of pupils was limited, the masters and mistresses, learned in divers modern accomplishments, numerous, and the dietary of foreign slops and messes without stint.

Dull and gray as the English sky seemed to her, and dreary as was the aspect of London in October, this girl was glad to return to her native land. She had felt herself very lonely in the French school, forgotten and deserted by her own kindred, a creature to be pitied; and hers was a nature to which pity was a torture. Other girls had gone home to England for their holidays; but vacation after vacation went by, and every occasion brought Clarissa Lovel the same coldly worded letter from her father, telling her that it was not convenient for him to receive her at home, that he had heard with pleasure of her progress, and that experienced people with whom he had conferred, had agreed with him that any interruption to the regular course of her studies could not fail to be a disadvantage to her in the future.

'They are all going home except me, papa,' she wrote piteously on one occasion, 'and I feel as if I were different from them, somehow. Do let me come home to Arden for this one year. I don't think my schoolfellows believe me when I talk of home, and the gardens and the dear old park. I have seen it in their faces, and you cannot think how hard it is to bear. And I want to see you, papa. You must not fancy that, because I speak of these things, I

am not anxious for that. I do want to see you very much. By and by, when I am grown-up, I shall seem a stranger to you.'

To this letter, and to many such letters, Mr. Lovel's reply was always the same. It did not suit his convenience that his only daughter should return to England until her education was completed. Perhaps it would have suited him better could she have remained away altogether; but he did not say as much as that; he only let her see very clearly that there was no pleasure for him in the prospect of her return.

And yet she was glad to go back. At the worst it was going home. She told herself again and again, in those meditations upon her future life which were not so happy as a girl's reveries should be,—she told herself that her father must come to love her in time. She was ready to love him so much on her part; to be so devoted, faithful, and obedient, to bear so much from him if need were, only to be rewarded with his affection in the end.

So at eighteen years of age Clarissa Lovel's education was finished, and she came home alone from a quiet little suburban village just outside Paris, and having arrived to-night at the Great Northern Station, King's Cross, had still a long journey before her.

Mr. Lovel lived near a small town called Holborough, in the depths of Yorkshire; a dreary little town enough, but boasting several estates of considerable importance in its neighbourhood. In days gone by, the Lovels had been people of high standing in this northern region, and Clarissa had yet to learn how far that standing was diminished.

She had been seated about five minutes in a comfortable corner of a first-class carriage, with a thick shawl over her knees, and all her little girlish trifles of books and travelling-bags gathered about her, and she had begun to flatter herself with the pleasing fancy that she was to have the compartment to herself for the first stage of the journey, perhaps for the whole of the journey, when a porter flung open the door with a bustling air, and a gentleman came in, with more travelling-rugs, canes, and umbrellas, Russia-leather bags, and despatch-boxes, than Clarissa had ever before beheld a traveller encumbered with. He came into the carriage very quietly, however, in spite of this impedimenta, arranged his belongings in a methodical manner, and without the slightest inconvenience to Miss Lovel, and then seated himself next the door, upon the farther side of the carriage.

Clarissa looked at him rather anxiously, wondering whether they two were to be solitary companions throughout the whole of that long night journey. She had no prudish horror of such a position, only a natural girlish shyness in the presence of a stranger.

The traveller was a man of about thirty, tall, broad-shouldered, with long arms, and powerful-looking hands, ungloved, and bronzed a little by sun and wind. There was the same healthy bronze upon his face, Clarissa perceived, when he took off his hat and hung it up above him; rather a handsome face, with a long straight nose, dark-blue eyes with thick brown eyebrows, a well-cut mouth and chin, and a thick thatch of crisp dark-brown hair waving round a broad, intelligent-looking forehead. The firm, full upper lip was half hidden by a carefully trained moustache; and in his dress and bearing the stranger had altogether a military air; one could fancy him a cavalry soldier. That bare muscular hand seemed made to grasp the massive hilt of a sabre.

His expression was grave—grave and a little proud, Clarissa thought; and, unused as she was to lonely wanderings in this outer world, she felt somehow that this man was a gentleman, and that she need be troubled by no fear that he would make his

presence in any way unpleasant to her, let their journey together last as long as it would.

She sank back into her corner with a feeling of relief. It would have been more agreeable for her to have had the carriage to herself; but if she must needs have a companion, there was nothing obnoxious in this one.

For about an hour they sped on in silence. This evening train was not exactly an express, but it was a tolerably quick train, and the stoppages were not frequent. The dull gray twilight melted into a fair tranquil night. The moon rose early; and the quiet English landscape seemed very fair to Clarissa Lovel in that serene light. She watched the shadowy fields flitting past; here and there a still pool, or a glimpse of running water; beyond, the sombre darkness of wooded hills; and above that dark background a calm starry sky. Who shall say what dim poetic thoughts were in her mind that night, as she looked at these things? Life was so new to her, the future such an unknown country—a paradise perhaps, or a drear gloomy waste, across which she must travel with bare bleeding feet. How should she know? She only knew that she was going home to a father who had never loved her, who had deferred the day

of her coming as long as it was possible for him decently to do so.

The traveller in the opposite corner of the carriage glanced at Miss Lovel now and then as she looked out of the window. He could just contrive to see her profile, dimly lighted by the flickering oil lamp; a very perfect profile, he thought; a forehead that was neither too high nor too low, a small aquiline nose, a short upper lip, and the prettiest mouth and chin in the world. It was just a shade too pensive now, the poor little mouth, he thought pityingly; and he wondered what it was like when it smiled. And then he began to arrange his lines for winning the smile he wanted so much to see from those thoughtful lips. It was, of course, for the gratification of the idlest, most vagabond curiosity that he was eager to settle this question: but then, on such a long dreary journey, a man may be forgiven for a good deal of idle curiosity.

He wondered who his companion was, and how she came to be travelling alone, so young, so pretty, so much in need of an escort. There was nothing in her costume to hint at poverty, nor does poverty usually travel in first-class carriages. She might have her maid lurking somewhere in the second-class,

he said to himself. In any case, she was a lady. He had no shadow of doubt about that.

She was tall, above the ordinary height of women. There was a grace in the long flowing lines of her figure more striking than the beauty of her face. The long slim throat, the sloping shoulder, not to be disguised even by the clumsy folds of a thick shawl —these the traveller noted, in a lazy contemplative mood, as he lolled in his corner, meditating an easy opening for a conversation with his fair fellow-voyager.

He let some little time slip by in this way, being a man to whom haste was almost unknown. This idle artistic consideration of Miss Lovel's beauty was a quiet kind of enjoyment for him. She, for her part, seemed absorbed in watching the landscape—a very commonplace English landscape in the gentleman's eyes—and was in no way disturbed by his placid admiration.

He had a heap of newspapers and magazines thrown pell-mell into the empty seat next him; and arousing himself with a faint show of effort presently, he began to turn these over with a careless hand.

The noise of his movements startled Clarissa; she looked across at him, and their eyes met. This was

just what he wanted. He had been curious to see her eyes. They were hazel, and very beautiful, completing the charm of her face.

'May I offer you some of these things?' he said. 'I have a reading lamp in one of my bags, which I will light for you in a moment. I won't pledge myself for your finding the magazines very amusing, but anything is better than the blankness of a long dreary journey.'

'Thank you, you are very kind; but I don't care about reading to-night; I could not give you so much trouble.'

'Pray don't consider that. It is not a question of a moment's trouble. I'll light the lamp, and then you can do as you like about the magazines.'

He stood up, unlocked one of his travelling-bags, the interior of which glittered like a miniature arsenal, and took out a lamp, which he lighted in a rapid dextrous manner, though without the faintest appearance of haste, and fixed with a brass apparatus of screws and bolts to the arm of Clarissa's seat. Then he brought her a pile of magazines, which she received in her lap, not a little embarrassed by this unexpected attention. He had called her suddenly from strange vague dreams of the future, and it was not

easy to come altogether back to the trivial commonplace present.

She thanked him graciously for his politeness, but she had not smiled yet.

'Never mind,' the traveller said to himself; 'that will come in good time.'

He had the easiest way of taking all things in life, this gentleman; and having established Clarissa with her lamp and books, sank lazily back into his corner, and gave himself up to a continued contemplation of the fair young face, almost as calmly as if it had been some masterpiece of the painter's art in a picture-gallery.

The magazines were amusing to Miss Lovel. They beguiled her away from those shapeless visions of days to come. She began to read, at first with very little thought of the page before her, but, becoming interested by degrees, read on until her companion grew tired of the silence.

He looked at his watch—the prettiest little toy in gold and enamel, with elaborate monogram and coat of arms—a watch that looked like a woman's gift. They had been nearly three hours on their journey.

'I do not mean to let you read any longer,' he said, changing his seat to one opposite Clarissa.

'That lamp is very well for an hour or so, but after that time the effect upon one's eyesight is the reverse of beneficial. I hope your book is not very interesting.'

'If you will allow me to finish this story,' Clarissa pleaded, scarcely lifting her eyes from the page. It was not particularly polite, perhaps, but it gave the stranger an admirable opportunity for remarking the dark thick lashes, tinged with the faintest gleam of gold, and the perfect curve of the full white eyelids.

'Upon my soul, she is the loveliest creature I ever saw,' he said to himself; and then asked persistently, 'Is the story a long one?'

'Only about half-a-dozen pages more; O, do please let me finish it!'

'You want to know what becomes of some one, or whom the heroine marries, of course. Well, to that extent I will be a party to the possible injury of your sight.'

He still sat opposite to her, watching her in the old lazy way, while she read the last few pages of the magazine-story. When she came to the end, a fact of which he seemed immediately aware, he rose and extinguished the little reading-lamp, with an air of friendly tyranny.

'Merciless, you see,' he said, laughing. 'O, *la jeunesse*, what a delicious thing it is! Here have I been tossing and tumbling those unfortunate books about for a couple of hours at a stretch, without being able to fix my attention upon a single page; and here are you so profoundly absorbed in some trivial story, that I daresay you have scarcely been conscious of the outer world for the last two hours. O, youth and freshness, what pleasant things they are while we can keep them!'

'We were not allowed to read fiction at Madame Marot's,' Miss Lovel answered simply. 'Anything in the way of an English story is a treat when one has had nothing to read but Racine and Télémaque for about six years of one's life.'

'The Inimical Brothers, and Iphigenia; Athalie, as performed before Louis Quatorze, by the young ladies of St. Cyr, and so on. Well, I confess there are circumstances under which even Racine might become a bore; and Télémaque has long been a synonym for dreariness and dejection of mind. You have not seen Rachel? No, I suppose not. She was a great creature, and conjured the dry bones into living breathing flesh. And Madame Marot's establishment, where you were so hardly treated, is a school, I conclude?'

'Yes, it is a school at Belforêt, near Paris. I have been there a long time, and am going home now to keep house for papa.'

'Indeed! And is your journey a long one? Are we to be travelling companions for some time to come?'

'I am going rather a long way—to Holborough.'

'I am very glad to hear that, for I am going farther myself, to the outer edge of Yorkshire, where I believe I am to do wonderful execution upon the birds. A fellow I know has taken a shooting-box yonder, and writes me most flourishing accounts of the sport. I know Holborough a little, by the way. Does your father live in the town?'

'O, no; papa could never endure to live in a small country town. Our house is a couple of miles away —Arden Court; perhaps you know it?'

'Yes, I have been to Arden Court,' the traveller answered, with rather a puzzled air. 'And your papa lives at Arden. I—I did not know he had any other daughter,' he added in a lower key, to himself rather than to his companion. 'Then I suppose I have the pleasure of speaking to Miss—'

'My name is Lovel. My father is Marmaduke Lovel, of Arden Court.'

The traveller looked at her with a still more puzzled air, as if singularly embarrassed by this simple announcement. He recovered himself quickly, however, with a slight effort.

'I am proud and happy to have made your acquaintance, Miss Lovel,' he said; 'your father's family is one of the best and oldest in the North Riding.'

After this, they talked of many things; of Clarissa's girlish experiences at Belforêt; of the traveller's wanderings, which seemed to have extended all over the world.

He had been a good deal in India, in the Artillery, and was likely to return thither before long.

'I had rather an alarming touch of sunstroke a year ago,' he said, 'and was altogether such a shattered broken-up creature when I came home on sick leave, that my mother tried her hardest to induce me to sell out; but though I would do almost anything in the world to please her, I could not bring myself to do that; a man without a profession is such a lost wretch. It is rather hard upon her, poor soul; for my elder brother died not very long ago, and she has only my vagabond self left. "He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."'

'I have no mother,' Clarissa said mournfully; 'mine died when I was quite a little thing. I always envy people who can speak of a mother.'

'But, on the other hand, I am fatherless, you see,' the gentleman said, smiling. But Clarissa's face did not reflect his smile.

'Ah, that is a different thing,' she said softly.

They went on talking for a long while, talking about the widest range of subjects; and their flight across the moonlit country, which grew darker by and by, as that tender light waned, seemed swifter than Clarissa could have imagined possible, had the train been the most desperate thing in the way of an express. She had no vulgar commonplace shyness, mere school-girl as she was, and she had, above all, a most delightful unconsciousness of her own beauty; so she was quickly at home with the stranger, listening to him, and talking to him with a perfect ease, which seemed to him a natural attribute of high breeding.

'A Lovel,' he said to himself once, in a brief interval of silence; 'and so she comes of that unlucky race. It is scarcely strange that she should be beautiful and gifted. I wonder what my mother would say if she knew that my northern journey had brought

me for half-a-dozen hours *tête-à-tête* with a Lovel? There would be actual terror for her in the notion of such an accident. What a noble look this girl has!—an air that only comes after generations of blue blood untainted by vulgar admixture. The last of such a race is a kind of crystallisation, dangerously, fatally brilliant, the concentration of all the forces that have gone before.'

At one of their halting-places, Miss Lovel's companion insisted upon bringing her a cup of coffee and a sponge-cake, and waited upon her with a most brotherly attention. At Normanton they changed to a branch line, and had to wait an hour and a half in that coldest dreariest period of the night that comes before daybreak. Here the stranger established Clarissa in a shabby little waiting-room, where he made up the fire with his own hands, and poked it into a blaze with his walking-stick; having done which, he went out into the bleak night and paced the platform briskly for nearly an hour, smoking a couple of those cigars which would have beguiled his night-journey, had he been alone.

He had some thoughts of a third cigar, but put it back into his case, and returned to the waiting-room.

'I'll go and have a little more talk with the pret-

tiest woman I ever met in my life,' he said to himself. 'It is not very likely that we two shall ever see each other again. Let me carry away the memory of her face, at any rate. And she is a Lovel! Will she be as unfortunate as the rest of her race, I wonder? God forbid!'

Clarissa was sitting by the fire in the dingy little waiting-room, with one elbow resting on the arm of her chair, her chin leaning on her hand, and her eyes fixed thoughtfully upon a dull red chasm in the coals. She had taken off her gray felt hat, and she looked older without it, the traveller thought, in spite of her wealth of waving dark-brown hair, gathered into a great coil of plaits at the back of the graceful head. Perhaps it was that thoughtful expression which made her look older than she had seemed to him in the railway-carriage, the gentleman argued with himself; a very grave anxious expression for a girl's face. She had indeed altogether the aspect of a woman, rather than of a girl who had just escaped from boarding-school, and to whom the cares of life must needs be unknown.

She was thinking so deeply, that she did not hear the opening of the door, or her fellow-traveller's light footstep as he crossed the room. He was standing

on the opposite side of the fireplace, looking down at her, before she was aware of his presence. Then she raised her head with a start; and he saw her blush for the first time. 'You must have been absorbed in some profound meditation, Miss Lovel,' he said lightly.

'I was thinking of the future.

'Meaning your own future. Why, at your age the future ought to be a most radiant vision.'

'Indeed it is not that. It is all clouds and darkness. I do not see that one must needs be happy because one is young. There has been very little happiness in my life yet awhile, only the dreary monotonous routine of boarding-school.'

'But all that is over now, and life is just beginning for you. I wish I were eighteen instead of eight-and-twenty.'

'Would you live your life over again?'

The traveller laughed.

'That's putting a home question,' he said. 'Well, perhaps not exactly the same life, though it has not been a bad one. But I should like the feeling of perfect youth, the sense of having one's full inheritance of life lying at one's banker's, as it were, and being able to draw upon the account a little recklessly, in-

different as to the waste of a year or two. You see I have come to a period of existence in which a man has to calculate his resources. If I do not find happiness within the next five years, I am never likely to find it at all. At three-and-thirty a man has done with a heart, in a moral and poetic sense, and begins to entertain vague alarms on the subject of fatty degeneration.'

Clarissa smiled faintly, as if the stranger's idle talk scarcely beguiled her from her own thoughts.

'You said you had been at Arden,' she began rather abruptly; 'then you must know papa.'

'No, I have not the honour to know Mr. Lovel,' with the same embarrassed air which he had exhibited before in speaking of Arden Court. 'But I am acquainted—or I was acquainted, rather, for he and I have not met for some time—with one member of your family, a Mr. Austin Lovel.'

'My brother,' Clarissa said quickly, and with a sudden shadow upon her face.

'Your brother; yes, I supposed as much.'

'Poor Austin! It is very sad. Papa and he are ill friends. There was some desperate quarrel between them a few years ago; I do not even know what about; and Austin was turned out of doors, never to

come back any more. Papa told me nothing about it, though it was the common talk at Holborough. It was only from a letter of my aunt's that I learnt what had happened; and I am never to speak of Austin when I go home, my aunt told me.'

'Very hard lines,' said the stranger, with a sympathetic air. 'He was wild, I suppose, in the usual way. Your brother was in a line regiment when I knew him; but I think I heard afterwards that he had sold out, and had dropped away from his old set; had emigrated, I believe, or something of that kind; exactly the thing I should do, if I found myself in difficulties; turn backwoodsman, and wed some savage woman, who should rear my dusky race, and whose kindred could put me in the way to make my fortune by cattle-dealing; having done which, I should, of course, discover that fifty years of Europe are worth more than a cycle of Cathay, and should turn my steps homeward with a convenient obliviousness upon the subject of the savage woman.'

He spoke lightly, trying to win Clarissa from her sad thoughts, and with the common masculine idea, that a little superficial liveliness of this kind can lighten the load of a great sorrow.

'Come, Miss Lovel, I would give the world to see

you smile. Do you know that I have been watching for a smile ever since I first saw your face, and have not surprised one yet? Be sure your brother is taking life pleasantly enough in some quarter of the globe. We worthless young fellows always contrive to fall upon our feet.'

'If I could believe that he was happy, if I could think that he was leading an honourable life anywhere, I should not feel our separation so much,' the girl said mournfully; 'but to be quite ignorant of his fate, and not to be allowed to mention his name, that is hard to bear. I cannot tell you how fond I was of him when we were children. He was seven years older than I, and so clever. He wanted to be a painter, but papa would not hear of that. Yet I think he might have been happier if he had been allowed to have his own way. He had a real genius for art.'

'And you too are fond of art, I suppose?' hazarded the traveller, more interested in the young lady herself than in this reprobate brother of hers.

'Yes, I am very fond of it. It is the only thing I really care for. Of course, I like music to a certain extent; but I love painting with my whole heart.'

'Happy art, to be loved by so fair a votary! And you dabble with brushes and colours, of course?'

'A little.'

'A true young lady's answer. If you were a Raffaelle in glacé silk and crinoline, you would tell me no more than that. I can only hope that some happy accident will one day give me an opportunity of judging for myself. And now, I think, you had better put on your hat. Our train will be in almost immediately.'

She obeyed him; and they went out together to the windy platform, where the train rumbled in presently. They took their places in a carriage, the gentleman bundling in his rugs and travelling-bags and despatch-boxes with very little ceremony; but this time they were not alone. A plethoric gentleman, of the commercial persuasion, was sleeping laboriously in one corner.

The journey to Holborough lasted a little less than an hour. Miss Lovel and her companion did not talk much during that time. She was tired and thoughtful, and he respected her silence. As she drew nearer home, the happiness she had felt in her return seemed to melt away somehow, leaving vague anxieties and morbid forebodings in its stead. To go home to a father who would only be bored by her coming. It was not a lively prospect for a girl of eighteen.

The dull cold gray dawn was on the housetops of Holborough, as the train stopped at the little station. The traveller alighted, and assisted Clarissa's descent to the platform.

'Can I see about your luggage, Miss Lovel?' he asked; but looking up at that moment, the girl caught sight of a burly gentleman in a white neckcloth, who was staring in every direction but the right one.

'Thank you very much, no; I need not trouble you. My uncle Oliver is here to meet me—that stout gentleman over there.'

'Then I can only say good-bye. That tiresome engine is snorting with a fiendish impatience to bear me away. Good-bye, Miss Lovel, and a thousand thanks for the companionship that has made this journey so pleasant to me.'

He lifted his hat and went back to the carriage, as the stout gentleman approached Clarissa. He would fain have shaken hands with her, but refrained from that unjustifiable familiarity. And so, in the bleak early autumnal dawn, they parted.

CHAPTER II.

BEGINNING THE WORLD.

'WHO on earth was that man you were talking to, Clary?' asked the Reverend Mathew Oliver, when he had seen his niece's luggage carried off to a fly, and was conducting her to that vehicle. 'Is it any one you know?'

'O, no, uncle; only a gentleman who travelled in the same carriage with me from London. He was very kind.'

'You seemed unaccountably familiar with him,' said Mr. Oliver with an aggrieved air; 'you ought to be more reserved, my dear, at your age. A young lady travelling alone cannot be too careful. Indeed, it was very wrong of your father to allow you to make this long journey alone. Your aunt has been quite distressed about it.'

Clarissa sighed faintly; but was not deeply con-

cerned by the idea of her aunt's distress. Distress of mind, on account of some outrage of propriety on the part of her relatives, was indeed almost the normal condition of that lady.

'I travelled very comfortably, I assure you, uncle Oliver,' Clarissa replied. 'No one was in the least rude or unpleasant. And I am so glad to come home —I can scarcely tell you how glad — though, as I came nearer and nearer, I began to have all kinds of fanciful anxieties. I hope that all is well—that papa is quite himself.'

'O, yes, my dear; your papa is—himself,' answered the parson, in a tone that implied that he did not say very much for Mr. Lovel in admitting that fact. 'Your papa is well enough in health, or as well as he will ever acknowledge himself to be. Of course, a man who neither hunts nor shoots, and seldom gets out of bed before ten o'clock in the day, can't expect to be remarkably robust. But your father will live to a good old age, child, rely upon it, in spite of everything.'

'Am I going straight home, uncle?'

'Well, yes. Your aunt wished you to breakfast at the Rectory; but there are your trunks, you see, and altogether I think it's better for you to go home

at once. You can come and see us as often as you like.'

'Thank you, uncle. It was very kind of you to meet me at the station. Yes, I think it will be best for me to go straight home. I'm a little knocked-up with the journey. I haven't slept five minutes since I left Madame Marot's at daybreak yesterday.'

'You're looking rather pale; but you look remarkably well in spite of that—remarkably well. These six years have changed you from a child into a woman. I hope they gave you a good education yonder; a solid practical education, that will stand by you.'

'I think so, uncle. We were almost always at our studies. It was very hard work.'

'So much the better. Life is meant to be hard work. You may have occasion to make use of your education some day, Clary.'

'Yes,' the girl answered with a sigh; 'I know that we are poor.'

'I suppose so; but perhaps you hardly know how poor.'

'Whenever the time comes, I shall be quite ready to work for papa,' said Clarissa; yet she could not help wondering how the master of Arden Court could ever bring himself to send out his daughter as a go-

verness; and then she had a vague childish recollection that not tens of pounds, but hundreds, and even thousands, had been wanted to stop the gaps in her father's exchequer.

They drove through Holborough High-street, where there was the faint stir and bustle of early morning, windows opening, a housemaid kneeling on a doorstep here and there, an occasional tradesman taking down his shutters. They drove past the fringe of prim little villas on the outskirts of the town, and away along a country road towards Arden; and once more Clarissa saw the things that she had dreamed of so often in her narrow white bed in the bleak dormitory at Belforêt. Every hedge-row and clump of trees from which the withered leaves were drifting in the autumn wind, every white-walled cottage with moss-grown thatch and rustic garden, woke a faint rapture in her breast. It was home. She remembered her old friends the cottagers, and wondered whether goody Mason were still alive, and whether Widow Green's fair-haired children would remember her. She had taught them at the Sunday-school; but they too must have grown from childhood to womanhood, like herself, and were out at service, most likely, leaving Mrs. Green's cottage lonely.

She thought of these simple things, poor child, having so little else to think about, on this her coming home. She was not so foolish as to expect any warm welcome from her father. If he had brought himself just to tolerate her coming, she had sufficient reason to be grateful. It was only a drive of two miles from Holborough to Arden. They stopped at a lodge-gate presently; a little gothic lodge, which was gay with scarlet geraniums nnd chrysanthemums, and made splendid by railings of bronzed ironwork. Everything had a bright new look which surprised Miss Lovel, who was not accustomed to see such perfect order or such fresh paint about her father's domain.

'How nice everything looks!' she said.

'Yes,' answered her uncle, with a sigh; 'the place is kept well enough nowadays.'

A woman came out to open the gates—a brisk young person, who was a stranger to Clarissa, not the feeble old lodge-keeper she remembered in her childhood. The change, slight as it was, gave her a strange chill feeling.

'I wonder how many people that I knew are dead?' she thought.

They drove into the park, and here too, even in this autumn season, Clarissa perceived traces of care

and order that were strange to her. The carriage-road was newly gravelled, the chaos of underwood among the old trees had disappeared, the broad sweeps of grass were smooth and level as a lawn, and there were men at work in the early morning, planting rare specimens of the fir tribe in a new enclosure, which filled a space that had been bared twenty years before by Mr. Lovel's depredations upon the timber.

All this bewildered Clarissa; but she was still more puzzled, when, instead of approaching the Court, the fly turned sharply into a road leading across a thickly-wooded portion of the park, through which there was a public right of way leading to the village of Arden.

'The man is going wrong, uncle!' she exclaimed.

'No, no, my dear; the man is right enough.'

'But indeed, uncle Oliver, he is driving to the village.'

'And he has been told to drive to the village.'

'Not to the Court?'

'To the Court! Why, of course not. What should we have to do at the Court at half-past seven in the morning?'

'But I am going straight home to papa, am I not?'

'Certainly.'

And then, after staring at his niece's bewildered countenance for a few moments, Mr. Oliver exclaimed,

'Why, surely, Clary, your father told you—'

'Told me what, uncle?'

'That he had sold Arden.'

'Sold Arden! O, uncle, uncle!'

She burst into tears. Of all things upon this earth she had loved the grand old mansion where her childhood had been spent. She had so little else to love, poor lonely child, that it was scarcely strange she should attach herself to lifeless things. How fondly she had remembered the old place in all those dreary years of exile, dreaming of it as we dream of some lost friend. And it was gone from her for ever! Her father had bartered away that most precious birthright.

'O, how could he do it! how could he do it!' she cried piteously.

'Why, my dear Clary, you can't suppose it was a matter of choice with him. "Needs must when"—I daresay you know the vulgar proverb. Necessity has no law. Come, come, my dear, don't cry; your father won't like to see you with red eyes. It was very wrong of him not to tell you about the sale of

Arden — excessively wrong. But that's just like Marmaduke Lovel; always ready to shirk anything unpleasant, even to the writing of a disagreeable letter.'

'Poor dear papa! I don't wonder he found it hard to write about such a thing; but it would have been better for me to have known. It is such a bitter disappointment to come home and find the dear old place gone from us. Has it been sold very long?'

'About two years. A rich manufacturer bought it—something in the cloth way, I believe. He has retired from business, however, and is said to be overwhelmingly rich. He has spent a great deal of money upon the Court already, and means to spend more, I hear.'

'Has he spoiled it—modernised it, or anything of that kind?'

'No; I am glad to say that he—or his architect perhaps—has had the good taste to preserve the mediæval character of the place. He has restored the stonework, renewing all the delicate external tracery where it was lost or decayed, and has treated the interior in the same manner. I have dined with Mr. Granger once or twice since the work was finished, and I must say the place is now one of the finest in

Yorkshire—perhaps the finest, in its peculiar way. I doubt if there is so perfect a specimen of gothic domestic architecture in the county.'

'And it is gone from us for ever!' said Clarissa, with a profound sigh.

'Well, my dear Clary, it is a blow, certainly; I don't deny that. But there is a bright side to everything; and really your father could not afford to live in the place. It was going to decay in the most disgraceful manner. He is better out of it; upon my word he is.'

Clarissa could not see this. To lose Arden Court seemed to her unmitigated woe. She would rather have lived the dreariest, loneliest life in one corner of the grand old house, than have occupied a modern palace. It was as if all the pleasant memories of her childhood had been swept away from her with the loss of her early home. This was indeed beginning the world; and a blank dismal world it appeared to Clarissa Lovel, on this melancholy October morning.

They stopped presently before a low wooden gate, and looking out of the window of the fly, Miss Lovel saw a cottage which she remembered as a dreary uninhabited place, always to let; a cottage with a weedy garden, and a luxuriant growth of monthly roses and

honeysuckle covering it from basement to roof; not a bad sort of place for a person of small means and pretensions, but O, what a descent from the ancient splendour of Arden Court!—that Arden which had belonged to the Lovels ever since the land on which it stood was given to Sir Warren Wyndham Lovel, knight, by his gracious master King Edward IV., in acknowledgment of that warrior's services in the great struggle between Lancaster and York.

There were old-fashioned casement-windows on the upper story, and queer little dormers in the roof. Below, roomy bows had been added at a much later date than the building of the cottage. The principal doorway was sheltered by a rustic porch, spacious and picturesque, with a bench on each side of the entrance. The garden was tolerably large, and in decent order; and beyond the garden was a fine old orchard, divided from lawn and flower-beds only by a low hedge, full of bush-roses and sweet-brier. It was a very pretty place in summer, not unpicturesque even at this bleak season; but Clarissa was thinking of lost Arden, and she looked at Mill Cottage with mournful unadmiring eyes. There had been a mill attached to the place once. The old building was there still, indeed, converted into a primitive kind of

stable; hence its name of Mill Cottage. The stream still ran noisily a little way behind the house, and made the boundary which divided the orchard from the lands of the lord of Arden. Mill Cottage was on the very edge of Arden Court. Clarissa wondered that her father could have pitched his tent on the borders of his lost heritage.

'I think I would have gone to the other end of the world, had I been in his place,' she said to herself.

An elderly woman-servant came out, in answer to the flyman's summons; and at her call, a rough-looking young man emerged from the wooden gate opening into a rustic-looking stable-yard, where the lower half of the old mill stood, half-hidden by ivy and other greenery, and where there were dove-cotes and a dog-kennel.

Mr. Oliver superintended the removal of his niece's trunks, and then stepped back into the fly.

'There's not the slightest use in my stopping to see your father, Clary,' he said; 'he won't show for a couple of hours at least. Good-bye, my dear; make yourself as comfortable as you can. And come and see your aunt as soon as you've recovered from your long journey, and keep up your spirits, my dear.—Martha,

be sure you give Miss Lovel a good breakfast.—Drive back to the rectory, coachman.—Good-bye, Clarissa;' and feeling that he had shown his niece every kindness that the occasion required, Mr. Oliver bowled merrily homewards. He was a gentleman who took life easily—a pastor of the broad church—tolerably generous and good to his poor; not given to abnormal services or daily morning-prayer; content to do duty at Holborough parish-church twice on a Sunday, and twice more in the week; hunting a little every season, in a black coat, for the benefit of his health, as he told his parishioners; and shooting a good deal; fond of a good horse, a good cellar, a good dinner, and well-filled conservatories and glass-houses; altogether a gentleman for whom life was a pleasant journey through a prosperous country. He had, some twenty years before, married Frances Lovel; a very handsome woman—just a little faded at the time of her marriage—without fortune. There were no children at Holborough Rectory, and everything about the house and gardens bore that aspect of perfect order only possible to a domain in which there are none of those juvenile destroyers.

'Poor girl,' Mr. Oliver muttered to himself, as he jogged comfortably homewards, wondering whether

his people would have the good sense to cook 'those grouse' for breakfast. 'Poor Clary, it was very hard upon her; and just like Marmaduke, not to tell her.'

CHAPTER III.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

While Mr. Oliver went back to the Rectory, cheered by the prospect of possible grouse, Clarissa entered her new home, so utterly strange to her in its insignificance. The servant, Martha, who was a stranger to her, but who had a comfortable friendly face, she thought, led her into a room at the back of the cottage, with a broad window opening on to a lawn, beyond which Clarissa saw the blue mill-stream. It was not a bad room at all: countrified-looking and old-fashioned, with a low ceiling and wainscoted walls. Miss Lovel recognised the ponderous old furniture from the breakfast-room at Arden—high-backed mahogany chairs of the early Georgian era, with broad cushioned seats covered with faded needlework; a curious old oval dining-table, capable of accommodating about six; and some slim Chippendale coffee-

tables and cheffoniers, upon which there were a few chipped treasures of old Battersea and Bow china. The walls were half-lined with her father's books—rare old books in handsome bindings. His easy-chair, a most luxurious one, stood in a sheltered corner of the hearth, with a crimson-silk banner-screen hanging from the mantelpiece beside it, and a tiny table close at hand, on which there were a noble silver-mounted meerschaum, and a curious old china jar for tobacco. The oval table was neatly laid for breakfast, and a handsome brown setter lay basking in the light of the fire. Altogether, the apartment had a very comfortable and home-like look.

'The tea's made, miss,' said the servant; 'and I've a savoury omelette ready to set upon the table. Perhaps you'd like to step upstairs and take off your things before you have your breakfast? Your papa begged you wouldn't wait for him. He won't be down for two hours to come.'

'He's quite well, I hope?'

'As well as he ever is, miss. He's a bit of an invalid at the best of times.'

Remembering what Mr. Oliver had said, Clarissa was not much disturbed by this intelligence. She was stooping to caress the brown setter, who had

been sniffing at her dress, and seemed anxious to inaugurate a friendship with her.

'This is a favourite of papa's, I suppose?' she said.

'O Lord, yes, miss. Our master do make a tremenjous fuss about Ponto. I think he's fonder of that dumb beast than any human creature. Eliza shall show you your room, miss, while I bring in the teapot and suchlike. There's only me and Eliza, who is but a bit of a girl; and John Thomas, the groom, that brought your boxes in just now. It's a change for your pa from the Court, and all the servants he had there; but he do bear it like a true Christian, if ever there was one.'

Clarissa Lovel might have wondered a little to hear this—Christianity not being the dominant note in her father's character; but it was only like her father to refrain from complaint in the hearing of such a person as honest Martha. A rosy-faced girl of about fifteen conducted Miss Lovel to a pleasant bedroom, with three small windows; one curiously placed in an angle of the room, and from which—above a sweep of golden-tinted woodland—Clarissa could see the gothic chimneys of Arden Court. She stood at this window for nearly ten minutes, gazing

out across those autumnal woods, and wondering how her father had nerved himself for the sacrifice.

She turned away from the little casement at last with a heavy sigh, and began to take off her things. She bathed her face and head in cold water, brushed out her long dark hair, and changed her thick merino travelling-dress for a fresher costume. While she was doing these things, her thoughts went back to her companion of last night's journey; and, with a sudden flush of shame, she remembered his embarrassed look when she had spoken of her father as the owner of Arden Court. He had been to Arden, he had told her, yet had not seen her father. She had not been particularly surprised by this, supposing that he had gone to the Court as an ordinary sight-seer. Her father had never opened the place to the public, but he had seldom refused any tourist's request to explore it.

But now she understood that curious puzzled look of the stranger's, and felt bitterly ashamed of her error. Had he thought her some barefaced impostor, she wondered? She was disturbed in these reflections by the trim rosy-cheeked housemaid, who came to tell her that breakfast had been on the table nearly a quarter of an hour. But in the comfortable parlour

downstairs, all the time she was trying to do some poor justice to Martha's omelette, her thoughts dwelt persistently upon the unknown of the railway-carriage, and upon the unlucky mistake which she had made as to her father's position.

'He could never guess the truth,' she said to herself. 'He could never imagine that I was going home, and yet did not know that my birthplace had been sold.'

He was so complete a stranger to her—she did not even know his name—so it could surely matter very little whether he thought well or ill of her. And yet she could not refrain from torturing herself with all manner of annoying suppositions as to what he might think. Miss Lovel's character was by no means faultless, and pride was one of the strongest ingredients in it. A generous and somewhat lofty nature, perhaps, but unschooled and unchastened as yet.

After a very feeble attempt at breakfast, Clarissa went out into the garden, closely attended to Ponto, who seemed to have taken a wonderful fancy to her. She was very glad to be loved by something on her return home, even a dog. She went out through the broad window, and explored garden and orchard, and wandered up and down by the grassy bank of the

stream. She was fain to own that the place was pretty; and she fancied how well she might have loved it, if she had been born here, and had never been familiar with the broad terraces and verdant slopes of Arden Court. She walked in the garden till the village-church clock struck ten, and then went hastily in, half afraid lest her father should have come down to the parlour in her absence, and should be offended at not finding her ready to receive him.

She need not have feared this. Mr. Lovel was rarely offended by anything that did not cause him physical discomfort.

'How do you do, my dear?' he said, as she came into the room, in very much the same tone he might have employed had they seen each other every day for the last twelve months. 'Be sure you never do that again, if you have the faintest regard for me.'

'Do what, papa?'

'Leave that window open when you go out. I found the room a perfect ice-house just now. It was very neglectful of Martha to allow it. You'd better use the door at the end of the passage in future, when you go into the garden. It's only a little more trouble, and I can't stand open windows at this time of year.'

'I will be sure to do so, papa,' Clarissa answered meekly.

She went up to her father and kissed him, the warmth and spontaneity of their greeting a little diminished by this reproof about the window; but Clarissa had not expected a very affectionate reception, and was hardly disappointed. She had only a blank hopeless kind of feeling; a settled conviction that there was no love for her here, and that there had never been any.

'My dear father,' she began tenderly, 'my uncle told me about the sale of Arden. I was so shocked by the news—so sorry—for your sake.'

'And for your own sake too, I suppose,' her father answered bitterly. 'The less this subject is spoken of between us in future, the better we shall get on together, Clarissa.'

'I will keep silence, papa.'

'Be sure you do so,' Mr. Lovel said sternly; and then, with a sudden passion and inconsistency that startled his daughter, he went on: 'Yes, I have sold Arden—every acre. Not a rood of the land that has belonged to my race from generation to generation since Edward IV. was king, is left to me. And I have planted myself here—here at the very gates of

my lost home—so that I may drain the bitter cup of humiliation to the dregs. The fools who call themselves my friends think, that because I can endure to live here, I am indifferent to all I have lost; that I am an eccentric bookworm—an easy-going philosophical recluse, content to dawdle away the remnant of my days amongst old books. It pleases me to let them think so. Why, there is never a day that yonder trader's carriage, passing my windows, does not seem to drive over my body; not a sound of a woodman's axe or a carpenter's hammer in the place that was mine, that does not go straight home to my heart!'

'O, papa, papa!'

'Hush, girl! I can accept pity from no one—from you least of all.'

'Not from me, papa—your own child?'

'Not from you; because your mother's reckless extravagance was the beginning of my ruin. I might have been a different man but for her. My marriage was fatal, and in the end, as you see, has wrecked me.'

'But even if my mother was to blame, papa—as she may have been—I cannot pretend to deny the truth of what you say, being so completely ignorant

of our past history—you cannot be so cruel as to hold *me* guilty?'

'You are too like her, Clarissa,' Mr. Lovel answered, in a strange tone. 'But I do not want to speak of these things. It is your fault; you had no right to talk of Arden. *That* subject always raises a devil in me.'

He paced the room backwards and forwards for a few minutes in an agitated way, as if trying to stifle some passion raging inwardly.

He was a man of about fifty, tall and slim, with a distinguished air, and a face that must once have been very handsome, but perhaps, at its best, a little effeminate. The face was careworn now, and the delicate features had a pinched and drawn look, the thin lips a half-cynical, half-peevish expression. It was not a pleasant countenance, in spite of its look of high birth; nor was there any likeness between Marmaduke Lovel and his daughter. His eyes were light blue, large and bright, but with a cold look in them—a coldness which, on very slight provocation, intensified into cruelty; his hair pale auburn, crisp and curling closely round a high but somewhat narrow forehead.

He came back to the breakfast-table presently,

and seated himself in his easy-chair. He sipped a cup of coffee, and trifled listlessly with a morsel of dried salmon.

'I have no appetite this morning,' he said at last, pushing his plate away with an impatient gesture; 'nor is that kind of talk calculated to improve the flavour of a man's breakfast. How tall you have grown, Clarissa, a perfect woman; remarkably handsome too! Of course you know that, and there is no fear of your being made vain by anything I may say to you. All young women learn their value soon enough. You ought to make a good match, a brilliant match—if there were any chance for a girl in such a hole as this. Marriage is your only hope, remember, Clarissa. Your future lies between that and the drudgery of a governess's life. You have received an expensive education—an education that will serve you in either case; and that is all the fortune I can give you.'

'I hope I may marry well, papa, for your sake; but—'

'Never mind me. You have only yourself to think about.'

'But I never could marry any one I did not esteem, if the match were ever such a brilliant one.'

'Of course not. All schoolgirls talk like that; and in due course discover how very little esteem has to do with matrimony.. If you mean that you would like to marry some penniless wretch of a curate, or some insolvent ensign, for love, I can only say that the day of your marriage will witness our final parting. I should not make any outrageous fuss or useless opposition, rely upon it. I should only wish you good-bye.'

Clarissa smiled faintly at this speech. She expected so little from her father, that his hardest words did not wound her very deeply, nor did they extinguish that latent hope, 'He will love me some day.'

'I trust I may never be so imprudent as to lose you for ever, like that, papa. I must shut my heart resolutely against curates.'

'If bad reading is an abomination to you, you have only to open your ears. I have some confidence in you, Clary,' Mr. Lovel went on, with a smile that was almost affectionate. 'You look like a sensible girl; a little impulsive, I daresay; but knowledge of the world—which is an uncommonly hard world for you and me—will tone that down in good time. You are accomplished, I hope. Madame Marot wrote me a most flourishing account of your attainments; but

one never knows how much to believe of a schoolmistress's analysis.'

'I worked very hard, papa; all the harder because I was so anxious to come home; and I fancied I might shorten my exile a little by being very industrious.'

'Humph! You give yourself a good character. You sing and play, I suppose?'

'Yes, papa. But I am fonder of art than of music.'

'Ah, art is very well as a profession; but amateur art—French plum-box art—is worse than worthless. However, I am glad you can amuse yourself somehow; and I daresay, if you have to turn governess by and by, that sort of thing will be useful. You have the usual smattering of languages, of course?'

'Yes, papa. We read German and Italian on alternate days at Madame Marot's.'

'*I promessi Sposi*, and so on, no doubt. There is a noble Tasso in the bookcase yonder, and a fine old Petrarch, with which you may keep up your Italian. You might read a little to me of an evening sometimes. I should not mind it much.'

'And I should like it very much, papa,' Clarissa answered eagerly.

She was anxious for anything that could bring her father and herself together—that might lessen the gulf between them, if by ever so little.

And in this manner Miss Lovel's life began in her new home. No warmth of welcome, no word of fatherly affection, attended this meeting between a father and daughter who had not met for six years. Mr. Lovel went back to his books as calmly as if there had been no ardent impetuous girl of eighteen under his roof, leaving Clarissa to find occupation and amusement as best she might. He was not a profound student; a literary trifler rather, caring for only a limited number of books, and reading those again and again. Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Southey's *Doctor*, Montaigne, and Swift, he read continually. He was a collector of rare editions of the Classics, and would dawdle over a Greek play, edited by some learned German, for a week at a time, losing himself in the profundity of elaborate foot-notes. He was an ardent admirer of the lighter Roman poets, and believed the Horatian philosophy the only true creed by which a man should shape his existence. But it must not be supposed that books brought repose to the mind and heart of Marmaduke Lovel. He was a disappointed man, a discontented man, a

man given to brooding over the failure of his life, inclined to cherish vengeful feelings against his fellowmen on account of that failure. Books to him were very much what they might have been to some fiery-tempered ambitious soldier of fortune buried alive in a prison, without hope of release,—some slight alleviation of his anguish, some occasional respite from his dull perpetual pain; nothing more.

Clarissa's first day at Mill Cottage was a very fair sample of the rest of her life. She found that she must manage to spend existence almost entirely by herself—that she must expect the smallest amount of companionship from her father.

'This is the room in which I generally sit,' her father said to her that first morning after breakfast; 'my books are here, you see, and the aspect suits me. The drawing-room will be almost entirely at your disposal. We have occasional callers, of course; I have not been able to make these impervious country people comprehend that I don't want society. They sometimes pester me with invitations to dinner, which no doubt they consider an amazing kindness to a man in my position; invitations which I make a point of declining. It will be different with you, of course; and if any eligible people—Lady Laura

Armstrong or Mrs. Renthorpe for instance—should like to take you up, I shall not object to your seeing a little society. You will never find a rich husband at Mill Cottage.'

'Please do not speak of husbands, papa. I don't want to be married, and I shouldn't care to go into society without you.'

'Nonsense, child; you will have to do what is best for your future welfare. Remember that my death will leave you utterly unprovided for—absolutely penniless.'

'I hope you may live till I am almost an old woman, papa.'

'Not much chance of that; and even if I did, I should not care to have you on my hands all that time. A good marriage is the natural prospect of a good-looking young woman, and I shall be much disappointed if you do not marry well, Clarissa.'

The pale cold blue eyes looked at her with so severe a glance, as Mr. Lovel said this, that the girl felt she must expect little mercy from her father if her career in life did not realise his hopes.

'In short,' he continued, 'I look to you to redeem our fallen fortunes. I don't want the name of Lovel

to die out in poverty and obscurity. I look to you to prevent that, Clarissa.'

'Papa,' said Clarissa, almost trembling as she spoke, 'it is not to me you should look for that. What can a girl do to restore a name that has fallen into obscurity? Even if I were to marry a rich man, as you say, it would only be to take another name, and lose my own identity in that of my husband. It is only a son who can redeem his father's name. There is some one else to whom you must look—'

'What!' cried her father vehemently, 'have you not been forbidden to mention that name in my hearing? Unlucky girl, you seem to have been born on purpose to outrage and pain me.'

'Forgive me, papa; it shall be the last time. But O, is there no hope that you will ever pardon—'

'Pardon,' echoed Mr. Lovel, with a bitter laugh; 'it is no question of pardon. I have erased that person's image from my mind. So far as I am concerned, there is no such man in the world. Pardon! You must induce me to reinstate him in my memory again, before you ask me to pardon.'

'And that can never be, papa?'

'Never!'

The tone of that one word annihilated hope in

Clarissa's mind. She had pushed the question to its utmost limit, at all hazards of offending her father. What was it that her brother Austin had done to bring upon himself this bitter sentence of condemnation? She remembered him in his early manhood, handsome, accomplished, brilliant; the delight and admiration of every one who knew him, except her father. Recalling those days, she remembered that between her father and Austin there had never been any show of affection. The talents and brilliant attributes that had won admiration from others seemed to have no charm in the father's eye. Clarissa could remember many a sneering speech of Mr. Lovel's, in which he had made light of his son's cleverness, denouncing his varied accomplishments as trivial and effeminate, and asking if any Englishman ever attained an honourable distinction by playing the piano, or modelling in clay.

'I would rather have my son the dullest plodder that ever toiled at the bar, or droned bald platitudes from a pulpit, than the most brilliant drawing-room idler, whose amateur art and amateur music ever made him the fashion of a single season, to leave him forgotten in the next. I utterly despise an accomplished man.'

Austin Lovel had let such speeches as this go by him with a languid indifference, that testified at once to his easy temper and his comfortable disregard of his father's opinion. He was fond of his little sister Clary, in rather a careless way, and would suffer her companionship, juvenile as she was at that time, with perfect good-nature, allowing her to spoil his drawing-paper with her untutored efforts, and even to explore the sacred mysteries of his colour-box. In return for this indulgence, the girl loved him with intense devotion, and believed in him as the most brilliant of mankind.

Clarissa Lovel recalled those departed days now with painful tenderness. How kind and gracious Austin had been to her! How happy they had been together! sometimes wandering for a whole day in the park and woods of Arden, he with his sketching apparatus, she with a volume of Sir Walter Scott, to read aloud to him while he sketched, or to read him to sleep with very often. And then what delight it had been to sit by his side while he lay at full length upon the mossy turf, or half buried in fern—to sit by him supremely happy, reading or drawing, and looking up from her occupation every now and then to glance at the sleeper's handsome face in loving admiration.

Those days had been the happiest of her life. When Austin left Arden, he seemed always to carry away the brightness of her existence with him; for without him her life was very lonely—a singularly joyless life for one so young. Then, in an evil hour, as she thought, there came their final parting. How well she remembered her brother loitering on the broad terrace in front of Arden Court, in the dewy summer morning, waiting to bid her good-bye! How passionately she had clung to him in that farewell embrace, unable to tear herself away, until her father's stern voice summoned her to the carriage that was to take her on the first stage of her journey!

'Won't you come to the station with us, Austin?' she pleaded.

'No, Clary,' her brother answered with a glance at her father. '*He* does not want me.'

And so they had parted; never to meet any more upon this earth perhaps, Clarissa said to herself, in her dismal reveries to-day. 'That stranger in the railway carriage spoke of his having emigrated. He will live and die far away, perhaps on the other side of the earth, and I shall never see his bright face again. O, Austin, Austin, is this the end of all our summer days in Arden woods long ago!'

CHAPTER IV.

CLARISSA IS 'TAKEN UP.'

For some time there was neither change nor stir in Clarissa Lovel's new life. It was not altogether an unpleasant kind of existence, perhaps, and Miss Lovel was inclined to make the best of it. She was very much her own mistress, free to spend the long hours of her monotonous days according to her own pleasure. Her father exacted very little from her, and received her dutiful attentions with an air of endurance which was not particularly encouraging. But Clarissa was not easily disheartened. She wanted to win her father's affection; and again and again, after every new discouragement, she told herself that there was no reason why she should not ultimately succeed in making herself as dear to him as an only daughter should be. It was only a question of time and patience. There was no reason that he

should not love her, no possible ground for his coldness. It was his nature to be cold, perhaps; but those cold natures have often proved capable of a single strong attachment. What happiness it would be to win this victory of love!

'We stand almost alone in the world,' she said to herself. 'We had need be very dear to each other.'

So, though the time went by, and she made no perceptible progress towards this happy result, Clarissa did not despair. Her father tolerated her, and even this was something; it seemed a great deal when she remembered her childhood at Arden, in which she had never known what it was to be in her father's society for an hour at a time, and when, but for chance meetings in corridors and on staircases, she would very often have lived for weeks under the same roof with him without seeing his face or hearing his voice.

Now it was all different; she was a woman now, and Mill Cottage was scarcely large enough to accommodate two separate existences, even had Mr. Lovel been minded to keep himself aloof from his daughter. This being so, he tolerated her, treating her with a kind of cold politeness, which might have been tolerably natural in some guardian burdened with the

charge of a ward he did not care for. They rarely met until dinner-time, Clarissa taking her breakfast about three hours before her father left his room. But at seven they dined together, and spent the long winter evenings in each other's company, Clarissa being sometimes permitted to read aloud in German or Italian, while her father lay back in his easy-chair, smoking his meerschaum, and taking the amber mouthpiece from his lips now and then to correct an accent or murmur a criticism on the text. Sometimes, too, Mr. Lovel would graciously expound a page or two of a Greek play, or dilate on the subtilty of some learned foot-note, for his daughter's benefit, but rather with the air of one gentleman at his club inviting the sympathy of another gentleman than with the tone of a father instructing his child.

Sometimes, but very rarely, they had company. Mr. Oliver and his wife would dine with them occasionally, or the Vicar of Arden, a grave bachelor of five-and-thirty, would drop in to spend an hour or two of an evening. But besides these they saw scarcely any one. The small professional men of Holborough Mr. Lovel held in supreme contempt, a contempt of which those gentlemen themselves were thoroughly aware; the county people whom he had been accus-

tomed to receive at Arden Court he shrank from with a secret sense of shame, in these days of his fallen fortunes. He had therefore made for himself a kind of hermit life at Mill Cottage; and his acquaintance had come, little by little, to accept this as his established manner of existence. They still called upon the recluse occasionally, and sent him cards for their state dinners, averse from any neglect of a man who had once occupied a great position among them; but they were no longer surprised when Mr. Lovel pleaded his feeble health as a reason for declining their hospitality. A very dull life for a girl, perhaps; but for Clarissa it was not altogether an unhappy life. She was at an age when a girl can make an existence for herself out of bright young fancies and vague deep thoughts. There was that in her life just now which fades and perishes with the passing of years; a subtle indescribable charm, a sense of things beyond the common things of daily life. If there had been a closer bond of union between her father and herself, if there had not been that dark cloud upon her brother's life, she might have made herself entirely happy; she might almost have forgotten that Arden was sold, and a vulgar mercantile stranger lord of those green slopes and broad ancient terraces she loved so well.

As it was, the loneliness of her existence troubled her very little. She had none of that eager longing for 'society' or 'fashion' wherewith young ladies who live in towns are apt to inoculate one another. She had no desire to shine, no consciousness of her own beauty; for the French girls at Madame Marot's had been careful not to tell her that her pale patrician face was beautiful. She wished for nothing but to win her father's love, and to bring about some kind of reconciliation between him and Austin. So the autumn deepened into winter, and the winter brightened into early spring, without bringing any change to her life. She had her colour-box and her easel, her books and piano, for her best companions; and if she did not make any obvious progress towards gaining her father's affection, she contrived, at any rate, to avoid rendering her presence in any way obnoxious to him.

Two or three times in the course of the winter Mrs. Oliver gave a little musical party, at which Clarissa met the small gentry of Holborough, who pronounced her a very lovely girl, and pitied her because of her father's ruined fortunes. To her inexperience these modest assemblies seemed the perfection of gaiety; and she would fain have accepted the invitations that followed them, from the wives of Holbor-

ough bankers and lawyers and medical men to whom she had been introduced. Against this degradation, however, Mr. Lovel resolutely opposed himself.

'No, Clarissa,' he said sternly; 'you must enter society under such auspices as I should wish, or you must be content to remain at home. I can't have a daughter of mine hawked about in that petty Holborough set. Lady Laura will be at Hale Castle by and by, I daresay. If she chooses to take you up, she can do so. Pretty girls are always at par in a country house, and at the Castle you would meet people worth knowing.'

Clarissa sighed. Those cordial Holborough gentry had been so kind to her, and this exclusiveness of her father's chilled her, somehow. It seemed to add a new bitterness to their poverty—to that poverty, by the way, of which she had scarcely felt the sharp edges yet awhile. Things went very smoothly at Mill Cottage. Her father lived luxuriously, after his quiet fashion. One of the best wine-merchants at the west-end of London supplied his claret; Fortnum and Mason furnished the condiments and foreign rarities which were essential for his breakfast-table. There seemed never any lack of money, or only when Clarissa ventured to hint at the scantiness of her school-

wardrobe, on which occasion Mr. Lovel looked very grave, and put her off with two or three pounds to spend at the Holborough draper's.

'I should want so many new clothes if I went to the Castle, papa,' she said rather sadly one day, when her father was talking of Lady Laura Armstrong; but Mr. Lovel only shrugged his shoulders.

'A young woman is always well-dressed in a white muslin gown,' he said carelessly. 'I daresay a few pounds would get you all you want.'

The Castle was a noble old place at Hale, a village about six miles from Holborough. It had been the family seat of the Earl of Roxham ever since the reign of Edward VI.; but, on the Roxham race dying out, some fifty years before this, had become the property of a certain Mr. Armstrong, a civilian who had made a great fortune in the East, in an age when great fortunes were commonly made by East-Indian traders. His only son had been captain in a crack regiment, and had sold out of the army after his father's death, in order to marry Lady Laura Challoner, second daughter of the Earl of Calderwood, a nobleman of ancient lineage and decayed fortunes, and to begin life as a country gentleman under her wise governance. The Armstrongs were said to be a very happy

couple; and if the master of Hale Castle was apt to seem something of a cipher in his own house, the house was an eminently agreeable one, and Lady Laura popular with all classes. Her husband adored her, and had surrendered his judgment to her guidance with a most supreme faith in her infallibility. Happily, she exercised her power with that subtle tact which is the finest gift of woman, and his worst enemies could scarcely call Frederick Armstrong a henpecked husband.

The spring and early summer brought no change to Clarissa's life. She had been at home for the greater part of a year, and in all that time one day had resembled another almost as closely as in the scholastic monotony of existence at Madame Marot's. And yet the girl had shaped no complaint about the dulness of this tranquil routine, even in her inmost unspoken thoughts. She was happy, after a quiet fashion. She had a vague sense that there was a broader, grander kind of life possible to womanhood; a life as different from her own as the broad river that lost itself in the sea was different from the placid millstream that bounded her father's orchard. But she had no sick fretful yearning for that wider life. To win her father's affection, to see her brother re-

stored to his abandoned home—these were her girlish dreams and simple unselfish hopes.

In all the months Clarissa Lovel had spent at Mill Cottage she had never crossed the boundary of that lost domain she loved so well. There was a rustic bridge across the millstream, and a wooden gate opening into Arden woods. Clarissa very often stood by this gate, leaning with folded arms upon the topmost bar, and looking into the shadowy labyrinth of beech and pine with sad dreamy eyes, but she never went beyond the barrier. Honest Martha asked her more than once why she never walked in the wood, which was so much pleasanter than the dusty high-road, or even Arden common, an undulating expanse of heathy waste beyond the village, where Clarissa would roam for hours on the fine spring days, with a sketch-book under her arm. The friendly peasant woman could not understand that obstinate avoidance of a beloved scene—that sentiment which made her lost home seem to Clarissa a thing to shrink from, as she might have shrunk from beholding the face of the beloved dead.

It was bright midsummer weather, a glorious prolific season, with the thermometer ranging between seventy and eighty, when Lady Laura Armstrong did

at last make her appearance at Mill Cottage. The simple old-fashioned garden was all aglow with roses; the house half hidden beneath the luxuriance of foliage and flowers, a great magnolia on one side climbing up to the dormer windows, on the other pale monthly roses, and odorous golden and crimson tinted honeysuckle. Lady Laura was in raptures with the place. She found Clarissa sitting in a natural arbour made by a group of old hawthorns and a wild plum-tree, and placed herself at once upon a footing of perfect friendliness and familiarity with the girl. Mr. Lovel was out—a rare occurrence. He had gone for a stroll through the village with Ponto.

'And why are you not with him?' asked Lady Laura, who, like most of these clever managing women, had a knack of asking questions. 'You must be a better companion than Ponto.'

'Papa does not think so. He likes walking alone. He likes to be quite free to dream about his books, I fancy, and it bores him rather to have to talk.'

'Not a very lively companion for you, I fear. Why, child, how dismal your life must be!'

'O, no; not dismal. It is very quiet, of course; but I like a quiet life.'

'But you go to a good many parties, I suppose,

in Holborough and the neighbourhood? I know the Holborough people are fond of giving parties, and are quite famous for croquet.'

'No, Lady Laura; papa won't let me visit any one at Holborough, except my uncle and aunt, the Olivers.'

'Yes; I know the Olivers very well indeed. Remarkably pleasant people.'

'And I don't even know how to play croquet.'

'Why, my poor benighted child, in what a state of barbarism this father of yours is bringing you up! How are you ever to marry and take your place in the world? And with your advantages, too! What can the man be dreaming about? I shall talk to him very seriously. We are quite old friends, you know, my dear, and I can venture to say what I like to him. You must come to me immediately. I shall have a houseful of people in a week or two, and you shall have a peep at the gay world. Poor little prison flower! no wonder you look thoughtful and pale. And now show me your garden, please, Miss Lovel. We can stroll about till your father comes home; I mean to talk to him *at once*.'

Energy was one of the qualities of her own character for which Laura Armstrong especially valued

herself. She was always doing something or other which she was not actually called upon by her own duty or by the desire of other people to do, and she was always eager to do it 'at once.' She had come to Mill Cottage intending to show some kindness to Clarissa Lovel, whose father and her own father, the Earl of Calderwood, had been firm friends in the days when the master of Arden entertained the county; and Clarissa's manner and appearance having impressed her most favourably, she was eager to do her immediate service, to have her at the Castle, and show her to the world, and get her a rich husband if possible.

In honest truth, this Lady Laura Armstrong was a kindly disposed sympathetic woman, anxious to make the best of the opportunities which Providence had given her with so lavish a hand, and to do her duty towards her less fortunate neighbours. The office of Lady Bountiful, the position of patroness, suited her humour. Her active frivolous nature, which spurned repose and yet never rose above trifles, found an agreeable occupation in the exercise of this kind of benign influence upon other people's lives. Whether she would have put herself seriously out of the way for the benefit of any of these people to whom she was so

unfailingly beneficent, was a question which circumstances had never yet put to the test. Her benevolence had so far been of a light airy kind, which did not heavily tax her bodily or mental powers, or even the ample resources of her purse.

She was a handsome woman, after a fair, florid, rather redundant style of beauty, and was profoundly skilled in all those arts of costume and decoration by which such beauty is improved. A woman of middle height, with a fine figure, a wealth of fair hair, and an aquiline nose of the true patrician type, her admirers said. The mouth was rather large, but redeemed by a set of flashing teeth and a winning smile; the chin inclined to be of that order called 'double;' and indeed a tendency to increasing stoutness was one of the few cares which shadowed Lady Laura's path. She was five-and-thirty, and had only just begun to tell herself that she was no longer a girl. She got on admirably with Clarissa, as she informed her husband afterwards when she described the visit.

The girl was fascinated at once by that frank cordial manner, and was quite ready to accept Lady Laura for her friend, ready to be patronised by her even, with no sense of humiliation, no lurking desire

to revolt against the kind of sovereignty with which her new friend took possession of her.

Mr. Lovel came strolling in by and by, with his favourite tan setter, looking as cool as if there were no such thing as blazing midsummer sunshine, and found the two ladies sauntering up and down the grassy walk by the millstream, under the shadow of gnarled old pear and quince trees. He was charmed to see his dear Lady Laura. Clarissa had never known him so enthusiastic or so agreeable. It was quite a new manner which he put on—the manner of a man who is still interested in life. Lady Laura began almost at once with her reproaches. How could he be so cruel to this dear child? How could he be so absurd as to bury her alive in this way?

'She visits no one, I hear,' cried the lady; 'positively no one.'

'Humph! she has been complaining, has she?' said Mr. Lovel, with a sharp glance at his daughter.

'Complaining! O no, papa! I have told Lady Laura that I do not care about gaiety, and that you do not allow me to visit.'

'*Aut Cæsar aut nullus*—the best or nothing. I don't want Clarissa to be gadding about to all the

tea-drinkings in Holborough; and if I let her go to one house, I must let her go to all.'

'But you will let her come to me?'

'That *is* the best, my dear Lady Laura. Yes, of course she may come to you, whenever you may please to be troubled with her.'

'Then I please to be troubled with her immediately. I should like to carry her away with me this afternoon, if it were possible; but I suppose that can't be—there will be a trunk to be packed, and so on. When will you come to me, Miss Lovel? Do you know, I am strongly tempted to call you Clarissa?'

'I should like it so much better,' the girl answered, blushing.

'What! may I? Then I'm sure I will. It's such a pretty name, reminding one of that old novel of Richardson's, which everybody quotes and no one ever seems to have read. When will you come, Clarissa?'

'Give her a week,' said her father; 'she'll want a new white muslin gown, I daresay; young women always do when they are going visiting.'

'Now, pray don't let her trouble herself about anything of that kind; my maid shall see to all that sort of thing. We will make her look her best, de-

pend upon it. I mean this visit to be a great event in her life, Mr. Lovel, if possible.'

'Don't let there be any fuss or trouble about her. Every one knows that I am poor, and that she will be penniless when I am gone. Let her wear her white-muslin gown, and give her a corner to sit in. People may take her for one of your children's governesses, if they choose; but if she is to see society, I am glad for her to see the best.'

'People shall not take her for one of my governesses; they shall take her for nothing less than Miss Lovel of Arden. Yes, of Arden, my dear sir; don't frown, I entreat you. The glory of an old house like that clings to those who bear the old name, even though lands and house are gone—Miss Lovel, of Arden. By the way, how do you get on with your neighbour, Mr. Granger?'

'I do not get on with him at all. He used to call upon me now and then, but I suppose he fancied, or saw somehow or other—though I am sure I was laboriously civil to him—that I did not care much for his visits; at any rate, he dropped them. But he is still rather obtrusively polite in sending me game and hot-house fruit and flowers at odd times, in return for which favours I can send him nothing

but a note of thanks—"Mr. Lovel presents his compliments to Mr. Granger, and begs to acknowledge, with best thanks, &c."—the usual formula.'

'I am so sorry you have not permitted him to know you,' replied Lady Laura. 'We saw a good deal of him last year—such a charming man! what one may really call a typical man—the sort of person the French describe as solid—*carré par le base*—a perfect block of granite; and then, so *enormously* rich!'

Lady Laura glanced at Clarissa, as if she were inspired with some sudden idea. She was subject to a sudden influx of ideas, and always fancied her ideas inspirations. She looked at Clarissa, and repeated, with a meditative air, 'So enormously rich!'

'There is a grown-up daughter, too,' said Mr. Lovel; 'rather a stiff-looking young person. I suppose she is solid too.'

'She is not so charming as her father,' replied Lady Laura, with whom that favourite adjective served for everything in the way of praise. To her the Pyramids and Niagara, a tropical thunderstorm, a mazourka by Chopin, and a Parisian bonnet, were all alike charming. 'I suppose solidity isn't so nice in a girl,' she went on, laughing; 'but certainly Sophia

Granger is not such a favourite with me as her father is. I suppose she will make a brilliant marriage, however, sooner or later, unattractive as she may be; for she'll have a superb fortune,—unless, indeed, her father should take it into his head to marry again.'

'Scarcely likely that, I should think, after seventeen years of widowhood. Why, Granger must be at least fifty.'

'My dear Mr. Lovel, I hope you are not going to call that a great age.'

'My dear Lady Laura, am I likely to do so, when my own fiftieth birthday is an event of the past? But I shouldn't suppose Granger to be a marrying man,' he added meditatively; 'such an idea has never occurred to me in conjunction with him.' And here he glanced ever so slightly at his daughter: 'That sort of granite man must take a great deal of thawing.'

'There are suns that will melt the deepest snows,' answered the lady, laughing. 'Seriously, I am sorry you will not suffer him to know you. But I must run away this instant; my unfortunate ponies will be wondering what has become of me. You see this dear girl and I have got on so well together, that I

have been quite unconscious of time; and I had ever so many more calls to make, but those must be put off to another day. Let me see; this is Tuesday. I shall send a carriage for you this day week, Clarissa, soon after breakfast, so that I may have you with me at luncheon. Good-bye.'

Lady Laura kissed her new *protégée* at parting. She was really fond of everything young and bright and pretty; and having come to Mr. Lovel's house intending to perform a social duty, was delighted to find that the duty was so easy and pleasant to her. She was always pleased with new acquaintances, and was apt to give her friendship on the smallest provocation. On the other hand, there came a time when she grew just a little weary of these dear sweet friends, and began to find them less charming than of old; but she was never uncivil to them; they always remained on her list, and received stray gleams from the sunlight of her patronage.

'Well,' said Mr. Lovel interrogatively, when the mistress of Hale Castle had driven off, in the lightest and daintiest of phaetons, with a model groom and a pair of chestnut cobs, which seemed perfection, even in Yorkshire, where every man is a connoisseur in horseflesh. 'Well, child, I told you that you might

go into society if Lady Laura Armstrong took you up, but I scarcely expected her to be as cordial as she has been to-day. Nothing could have been better than the result of her visit; she seemed quite taken with you, Clary.'

It was almost the first time her father had ever called her Clary. It was only a small endearment, but she blushed and sparkled into smiles at the welcome sound. He saw the smile and blush, but only thought she was delighted with the idea of this visit to the Castle. He had no notion that the placid state of indifference which he maintained towards her was otherwise than agreeable to her feelings. He was perfectly civil to her, and he never interfered with her pursuits or inclinations. What more could she want from a father?

Perhaps she assumed a new value in his eyes from the time of that visit of Lady Laura's. He was certainly kinder to her than usual, the girl thought, as they sat on the lawn in the balmy June evening, sipping their after-dinner coffee, while the moon rose fair and pale above the woods of Arden Court. He contemplated her with a meditative air now and then, when she was not looking his way. He had always known that she was beautiful, but her beauty had

acquired a new emphasis from Lady Laura Armstrong's praises. A woman of the world of that class was not likely to be deceived, or to mistake the kind of beauty likely to influence mankind; and in the dim recesses of his mind there grew up a new hope —very vague and shadowy; he despised himself for dwelling upon it so weakly—a hope that made him kinder to his daughter than he had ever been yet—a hope which rendered her precious to him all at once. Not that he loved her any better than of old; it was only that he saw how, if fortune favoured him, this girl might render him the greatest service that could be done for him by any human creature.

She might marry Daniel Granger, and win back the heritage he had lost. It was a foolish thought, of course; Mr. Lovel was quite aware of the supremity of folly involved in it. This Granger might be the last man in the world to fall in love with a girl younger than his daughter; he might be as impervious to beauty as the granite to which Laura Armstrong had likened him. It was a foolish fancy, a vain hope; but it served to brighten the meditations of Marmaduke Lovel — who had really very few pleasant subjects to think about — with a faint rosy glow.

'It is the idlest dream,' he said to himself. 'When did good luck ever come my way? But O, to hold Arden Court again—by any tie—to die knowing that my race would inherit the old gray walls!'

CHAPTER V.

AT HALE CASTLE.

Mr. Lovel gave his daughter twenty pounds; a stretch of liberality which did not a little astonish her. She was very grateful for this unexpected kindness; and her father was fain to submit to be kissed and praised for his goodness more than was entirely agreeable to him. But he had been kinder to her ever since Lady Laura's visit, and her heart was very light under that genial influence. She thought he was beginning to love her, and that belief made her happy.

Nor was there anything but unqualified pleasure for her in the possession of twenty pounds, the largest sum she had ever had at her disposal. Although the solitude of her life and the troubles that overshadowed it had made her thoughtful beyond her years, she was still young enough to be able to put aside all thought,

and to live in the present. It was very pleasant to go into Holborough, with those four crisp new five-pound notes in her purse, to ask her aunt's advice about her purchases. Mrs. Oliver was enraptured to hear of the visit to the Castle, but naturally a little despondent about the circumstances under which the visit was to be paid. That Clarissa should go to Lady Laura's without a maid was eminently distressing to her aunt.

'I really think you ought to take Peters,' Mrs. Oliver said meditatively. 'She is a most reliable person; and of course nobody need know that she is not your own maid. I can fully rely upon her discretion for not breathing a word upon the subject to any of the Castle servants.'

Peters was a prim middle-aged spinster, with a small waist and a painfully erect figure, who combined the office of parlour-maid at the Rectory with that of personal attendant upon the Rector's wife—a person whom Clarissa had always regarded with a kind of awe—a lynx-eyed woman, who could see at a glance the merest hint of a stray hair-pin in a massive coil of plaits, or the minutest edge of a muslin petticoat visible below the hem of a dress.

'O no, aunt; please don't think of such a thing!'

the girl cried eagerly. 'I could not go with a borrowed servant; and I don't want a maid at all; I am used to do everything for myself. Besides, Lady Laura did not ask me to bring a maid.'

'She would take that for granted. She would never expect Mr. Lovel's daughter to travel without a maid.'

'But papa told her how poor he was.'

'Very unnecessary, and very bad taste on his part, I think. But of course she would not suppose him to be too poor to maintain a proper establishment in a small way. People of that kind only understand poverty in the broadest sense.'

Mrs. Oliver consented to forego the idea of sending Peters to the Castle, with a regretful sigh; and then the two ladies went out shopping—Clarissa in high spirits; her aunt depressed by a conviction, that she would not make her first entrance into society with the surroundings that befitted a Lovel of Arden Court.

There seemed so many things indispensable for this all-important visit. The twenty pounds were nearly gone by the time Miss Lovel's shopping was finished. A white muslin dress for ordinary occasions, some white gauzy fabric for a more important

toilette, a golden-brown silk walking or dinner dress, a white areophane bonnet, a gray straw hat and feather, gloves, boots, slippers, and a heap of small details. Considerable management and discretion were required to make the twenty pounds go far enough; but Mrs. Oliver finished her list triumphantly, leaving one bright golden sovereign in Clarissa's purse. She gave the girl two more sovereigns at parting with her.

'You will want as much as that for the servants when you are coming away, Clary,' she said imperatively, as Clarissa protested against this gift. 'I don't suppose you will be called upon to spend a shilling for anything else during your visit, unless there should happen to be a charity sermon while you are at Hale. In that case, pray don't put less than half-a-crown in the plate. Those things are noticed so much. And now, good-bye, my dear. I don't suppose I shall see you again between this and Tuesday. Miss Mallow will come to you to try-on the day after to-morrow at one o'clock, remember; be sure you are at home. She will have hard work to get your things ready in time; but I shall look in upon her once or twice, to keep her up to the mark. Pray do your best to secure Lady Laura's friendship.

Such an acquaintance as that is all-important to a girl in your position.'

Tuesday came very quickly, as it seemed to Clarissa, who grew a little nervous about this visit among strangers, in a great strange house, as it came nearer. She had seen the outside of the Castle very often: a vast feudal pile it seemed, seen across the bright river that flowed beneath its outward wall—a little darksome and gloomy at the best, Clarissa had thought, and something too grand to make a pleasant habitation. She had never seen the inner quadrangle, in all its splendour of modern restoration—sparkling freestone, fresh from the mason's chisel; gothic windows, glowing with rare stained glass; and the broad fertile gardens, with their terraces and banks of flowers, crowded together to make a feast of colour, sloping down to the setting sun.

It was still the same bright midsummer weather—a blue sky without a cloud, a look upon earth and heaven as if there would never be rain again, or anything but this glow and glory of summer. At eleven o'clock the carriage came from the Castle; Clarissa's trunks and travelling-bag were accommodated somehow; and the girl bade her father good-bye.

'I daresay I shall be asked to dinner while you

are there,' he said, as they were parting, 'and I may possibly come; I shall be curious to see how you get on.'

'O, pray do come, papa; I'm sure it will do you good.'

And then she kissed him affectionately, emboldened by that softer manner which he had shown towards her lately; and the carriage drove off. A beautiful drive past fertile fields, far stretching towards that bright river, which wound its sinuous way through all this part of the country; past woods that shut in both sides of the road with a solemn gloom even at midday—woods athwart which one caught here and there a distant glimpse of some noble old mansion lying remote within the green girdle of a park.

It was something less than an hour's drive from Arden to Hale: the village-church clock and a great clock in the Castle stables were both striking twelve as the carriage drove under a massive stone arch, above which the portcullis still hung grimly. It was something like going into a prison, Clarissa thought; but she had scarcely time for the reflection, when the carriage swept round a curve in the smooth gravel road, and she saw the sunny western front of the

Castle, glorious in all its brightness of summer flowers, and with a tall fountain leaping and sparkling up towards the blue sky.

She gave a little cry of rapture at sight of so much brightness and beauty, coming upon her all at once with a glad surprise. There were no human creatures visible; only the glory of fountain and flowers. It might have been the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, deep in the heart of the woodlands, for any evidence to the contrary, perceptible to Clarissa in this drowsy noontide; but presently, as the carriage drove up to the hall-door, a dog barked, and then a sumptuous lackey appeared, and anon another, who, between them, took Miss Lovel's travelling-bag and parasol, prior to escorting her to some apartment, leaving the heavier luggage to meaner hands.

'The saloon, or my lady's own room, miss?' one of the grandiose creatures demanded languidly.

'I would rather see Lady Laura alone at first, if you please.'

The man bowed, and conducted her up a broad staircase, lined with darksome pictures of battles by land and sea, along a crimson-carpeted corridor where there were many doors, to one particular portal at the southern end.

He opened this with a lofty air, and announced 'Miss Lovel.'

It was a very large room—all the rooms in this newly-restored part of the Castle were large and lofty (a great deal of the so-called 'restoration' had indeed been building, and many of these splendid rooms were new, newer even than the wealth of Frederick Armstrong)—a large room, furnished with chairs and tables and cabinets of satin wood, with oval medallions of pale blue Wedgwood let into the panelled doors of the cabinets, and a narrow beading of lustreless gold here and there; a room with pale blue silken hangings, and a carpet of white wood-anemones scattered on a turquoise-coloured ground. There were no pictures; art was represented only by a few choice bronzes and a pair of Venetian mirrors.

Lady Laura was busy at a writing-table, filling in the blanks in some notes of invitation. She was always busy. On one table there were an easel and the appliances of illumination; a rare old parchment Missal lying open, and my lady's copy of a florid initial close beside it. On a small reading-desk there was an open Tasso with a couple of Italian dictionaries near at hand. Lady Laura had a taste for languages, and was fond of reviving her acquaint-

ance with foreign classics. She was really the most indefatigable of women. It was a pity perhaps that her numerous accomplishments and her multifarious duties towards society at large left her so very little leisure to bestow upon her own children; but then, they had their foreign governesses, and maids—there was one poor English drudge, by the way, who seemed like a stranger in a far land—gifted in many tongues, and began to imbibe knowledge from their cradles. To their young imaginations the nursery wing of Hale Castle must have seemed remarkably like the Tower of Babel.

The lady of the Castle laid down her pen, and received Clarissa with warm affection. She really liked the girl. It was only a light airy kind of liking, perhaps, in unison with her character; but, so far as it went, it was perfectly sincere.

'My dear child, I am so glad to have you here,' she said, placing Miss Lovel beside her on a low sofa. 'You will find me dreadfully busy sometimes, I daresay; but you must not think me neglectful if I cannot be very much with you downstairs. You are to come in and out of this room whenever you please. It is not open to the world at large, you know, and I am supposed to be quite inaccessible

here; but it is open to my favourites, and I mean you to be one of them, Clarissa.'

'You are very good, dear Lady Laura.'

'No, I am not good; I daresay I am the most selfish creature in Christendom; but when I like people, I like them with all my heart. And now tell me what you think of Hale.'

'It is lovely—it is like fairyland.'

'Yes, it is pretty, isn't it, this new side? It has all been done in my time—it has all been my doing, indeed, I may venture to say; for Fred would have gone on living contentedly in the old rooms till his dying day. You can't imagine the trouble I took. I read no end of books upon the domestic architecture of the middle ages, went all over England hunting for model houses, and led the poor architect a fine life. But I think, between us, we succeeded in carrying out a very fine idea at last. The crenellated roof, with its machicolations, is considered a great success. There was a time when one was obliged to get a license from the sovereign to build that kind of thing; but it is all changed now. The sovereign is not afraid of rebellion, and the machicolations are only for ornament. You have not seen the old hall yet. That is splendid—a real original bit of the

Castle, you know, which has never been tampered with, as old as Edward III., with a raised platform at the upper end, where the lord of the castle used to sit while his vassals ate below him; and with a stone hearth in the centre, where they used to make their wood fires, all the smoke going through an opening in the roof—rather pleasant for my lord and his vassals, I should think! Take off your hat, Clarissa; or perhaps you would rather go to your room at once. Yes, you shall, dear; and I'll finish my letters, and we can meet at luncheon.'

Lady Laura rang a bell twice; which particular summons produced a very smart-looking maid, into whose charge my lady confided Clarissa, with a pretty little wave of her hand, and '*à bientôt*, dear child.'

The maid conducted Miss Lovel to a charming chintz-curtained bedroom on the second floor, looking westward over those gorgeous flower-banks; a bedroom with a bright-looking brass bedstead, and the daintiest chintz-patterned carpet, and nothing mediæval about it except the stone-framed gothic window.

'I will send a person to unpack your trunks, miss,' the maid said, when she had listened with a deferential air to Clarissa's praise of the room. 'I

am very glad you like your rooms; my lady was most anxious you should be pleased. I'll send Fosset, miss; she is a very handy young person, and will be always at your service to render you any assistance you may require.'

'Thank you—I am not likely to trouble her often; there is so very little assistance I ever want. Sometimes, when I am putting on an evening dress, I may ask for a little help perhaps—that is all.'

'She will be quite at your service, miss: I hope you will not scruple to ring for her,' the chief of the maids replied, and then made a dignified exit.

The maid of inferior degree, Fosset, speedily appeared; a pale-complexioned, meek-looking young woman, who set about unpacking Clarissa's trunks with great skill and quickness, and arranged their contents in the capacious maple wardrobe, while their owner washed her face and hands and brushed the dust of her brief journey out of her dark brown hair. A clamorous bell rang out the summons to the midday meal presently, and Clarissa went down to the hall, where a watchful footman took her in charge.

'Luncheon is served in the octagon room, miss,' he said, and straightway led her away to an apartment in an angle of the Castle: a room with a hea-

vily-carved oak ceiling, and four mullioned windows overlooking the river; a room hung with gilt and brown stamped leather, and furnished in the most approved mediæval style. There was an octagon table, bright with fruit and flowers, and a good many ladies seated round it, with only here and there a gentleman.

There was one of these gentlemen standing near Lady Laura's chair as Clarissa went into the room, tall and stout, with a very fair good-natured countenance, light blue eyes, and large light whiskers, whom, by reason of some careless remarks of her father's, she guessed at once to be Mr. Armstrong; a gentleman of whom people were apt to say, after the shortest acquaintance, that there was not much in him, but that he was the best fellow in the world. —an excellent kind of person to be intrusted with the disposal of a large fortune, a man by whom his neighbours could profit without a too painful sense of obligation, and who was never so happy as when a crowd of people were enjoying life at his expense. Friends who meant to say something very generous of Frederick Armstrong were wont to observe, that he was not such a fool as he looked. Nor, in the ordinary attributes of a country gentleman, was the

master of Hale Castle behind his compeers. He rode like Assheton Smith, never missed his bird in the open, and had a manly scorn of battues; was great in agriculture, and as good a judge of a horse as any man in Yorkshire. His literary attainments were perhaps limited to a comprehensive knowledge of the science of farriery, a profound study of *Ruff's Guide*, and a familiar acquaintance with *Bell's Life* and two or three weekly newspapers devoted to the agricultural interest; but as he had the happiness to live amongst a race which rather cultivates the divine gift of ignorance, his shortcomings awakened no scorn.

When he was known to have made a bad book for the Leger or the Great Ebor, his friends openly expressed their contempt for his mental powers; but no one despised him because an expensive university training had made him nothing more than a first-rate oarsman, a fair billiard-player, and a distinguished thrower of the hammer. He was just what a country gentleman should be in the popular idea—handsome, broad-shouldered, long-limbed, with the fist and biceps of a gladiator, and a brain totally unburdened by the scholiast's dryasdust rubbish: sharp and keen enough where the things that inte-

rested him were in question, and never caring to look beyond them.

To this gentleman Lady Laura introduced Clarissa.

'Fred, this is Miss Lovel—Clarissa Lovel—and you and she are to like each other very much, if you please. This is my husband, Clarissa, who cares more for the cultivation of short-horns — whatever kind of creatures those brutes may be—and ugly little shaggy black Highland cattle, than for my society, a great deal; so you will see very little of him, I daresay, while you are at the Castle. In London he is obliged to be shut-up with me now and then; though, as he attends nearly all the race-meetings, I don't see very much of him even there; but here he escapes me altogether.'

'Upon my word, Laura — upon my word, you know, Miss Lovel, there's not a syllable of truth in it,' exclaimed the gentleman with the light whiskers. 'My wife's always illuminating old Missals, or reading Italian, or practising the harmonium, or writing out lists of things for her Dorcas club, or something of that sort; and a fellow only feels himself in the way if he's hanging about her. She's the busiest woman in the world. I don't believe the prime

minister gets through more work or receives more letters than she does. And she answers 'em all too, by Jove; she's like the great Duke of Wellington.'

'Do you happen to take a lively interest in steam-ploughs and threshing machines, and that kind of thing, Clarissa?' asked Lady Laura.

'I'm afraid not. I never even saw a steam-plough; and I believe if I were to see one, I should think it a most unpicturesque object.'

'I am sorry to hear that. Fred would have been so delighted with you, if you'd shown agricultural proclivities. We had a young lady from Westmoreland here last year who knew an immense deal about farming. She was especially great upon pigs, I believe, and quite fascinated Fred by tramping about the home farm with him in thick boots. I was almost jealous. But now let me introduce you to some of my friends, Clarissa.'

Hereupon Miss Lovel had to bow and simper in response to the polite bows and simpers of half a dozen ladies. Mrs. Weldon Dacre and three Miss Dacres, Rose, Grace, and Amy, tall and bony damsels, with pale reddish hair, and paler eyebrows and eyelashes, and altogether more 'style' than beauty;

Mrs. Wilmot, a handsome widow, whom Frederick Armstrong and his masculine friends were wont to call 'a dasher;' Miss Fermor, a rather pretty girl, with a piquant nose and sparkling hazel eyes; and Miss Barbara Fermor, tall and slim and dark, with a romantic air. The gentlemen were a couple of officers—Major Mason, stout, dark, hook-nosed, and close-shaven; Captain Westleigh, fair, auburn-moustached and whiskered—and a meek-looking gentleman, of that inoffensive curate race, against which Clarissa had been warned by her father.

She found herself very quickly at home among these people. The Miss Fermors were especially gifted in the art of making themselves delightful to strangers; they had, indeed, undergone such training in a perpetual career of country-house visiting, that it would have gone hard with them had they not acquired this grace. The three tall pale Dacres, Rose, Grace, and Amy, were more conventional, and less ready to swear alliance with the stranger; but they were not disagreeable girls, and improved considerably after a few days' acquaintance, showing themselves willing to take the bass in pianoforte duets, sing a decent second, exhibit their sketch-books and photographic collections in a friendly man-

ner, and communicate new stitches and patterns in *point de Russe* or *point d'Alençon.*

After luncheon Miss Lovel went off with Captain Westleigh and Miss Fermor—Lizzie, the elder and livelier of the two sisters—to take her first lesson in croquet. The croquet-ground was a raised plateau to the left of the Italian garden, bounded on one side by a grassy slope and the reedy bank of the river, and on the other by a plantation of young firs; a perfect croquet-ground, smooth as an ancient bowling-green, and unbroken by invading shrub or flower-bed. There were some light iron seats on the outskirts of the ground here and there, and that was all.

Clarissa received her lesson, and (having been lucky enough to send her ball through the hoop now and then) was pronounced to have a natural genius for croquet. It was a pleasant, idle afternoon, passed amidst so bright and fair a scene, that the beauty of her surroundings alone was enough to give Clarissa's life a new zest—a day which the mind recalls in the stormier periods of after-life, wondering at its gracious peace, its utter freedom from care or thought. Too soon came the time when there could be no more of such girlish happiness for Clarissa, such perfect

respite from thought of to-morrow, or regret for yesterday.

By and by came dressing for dinner, and then an assemblage of visitors in the drawing-room—county people from neighbouring parks and halls and courts—mingling pleasantly with the Castle guests, and then dinner in the great dining-room; a splendid chamber, with a music-gallery at one end, and with the earliest crystal chandeliers ever used in England, and given by Queen Elizabeth to the Lord of Hale, for its chief decorations. At eight o'clock these crystal chandeliers glittered with the light of many wax-candles, though there was still the soft glow of sunset in the gardens beyond the great gothic windows.

That first visit to a great country house was like a new page in life to Clarissa. She had not wearied of her quiet existence at Mill Cottage, her books, her art, her freedom from the monotonous tasks and dull restraints of school; but she felt that if life could always be like this, it would be something very sweet and joyous. Captain Westleigh had contrived to take her in to dinner.

'I was determined to do it,' he told her confidentially, as they sat down; 'so I made a rush across to

you when I saw Lady Laura's eye upon you, with a malicious intention of billeting you upon young Halkin, the great cloth-manufacturer's son. I know Lady Laura so well; she will be trying to plant all those rich manufacturing fellows upon you; she has quite a mania for that sort of people.'

The Captain made himself very pleasant all through that long ceremonial of dinner. If the brilliant things which he said were not quite the newest in the world, they were at least new to Clarissa, who rewarded his efforts to please her by seeming very much amused, and flattered and stimulated him to new flights by her appreciation. He told her all about the people round her, making her feel less like a stranger in a foreign country; and that pageant-like dinner, long as it was, did not seem at all too long to be pleasant.

After dinner there was a little music and singing at one end of the drawing-room, to which people listened or not, as they pleased; a friendly whist-table established at the other end, at which four elderly, gray-whiskered, and bald-headed country gentlemen played gravely for an hour or so; and a good deal of desultory strolling out through the open windows to the terrace for the contemplation of the

moonlit gardens, with perhaps a spice of flirtation. Lady Laura was never quite happy unless she saw something like flirtation going on among her younger visitors. She was pleased to see Captain Westleigh's attention to Clarissa, though she would rather that James Halkin had occupied the ground. But, alas, Mr. Halkin, stiff and solemn as a policeman on duty, was standing by the chair of the very palest and least beautiful of the Miss Dacres, mildly discussing a collection of photographs of Alpine scenery. They had both been over the same country, and were quite enthusiastic when they came to peaks and mountain gorges that they remembered.

'I was there with another fellow, and he nearly slipped just on that edge there. It was as near as a—' Mr. Halkin was going to say 'a toucher,' but it occurred to him that that vague expression was scarcely permissible in conversation with a lady—'the nearest thing you ever saw in your life, in fact. If it hadn't been for his alpen-stock, it would have been all over with him; and the guides told us there'd been a fellow killed there the year before. We stopped at Rigot's—I think the dearest hotel I was ever at; but they gave us some very fair still champagne, very fair indeed.'

Lady Laura took occasion to warn Clarissa against the Captain when they separated for the night, in the corridor upon which my lady's rooms opened.

'Very nice, isn't he, dear? Come into my dressing-room for a few minutes' talk;' and my lady led Clarissa into another charming chamber, all blue silk and satin-wood, like the morning room. 'Yes, he is very nice, and he really seemed quite *épris*. Poor Herbert Westleigh! I've known him for years. He belongs to one of the oldest families in Somersetshire, and is a capital fellow, as my husband says; but a person not to be thought of by you, Clarissa. There are a crowd of brothers, and I doubt if Herbert has a hundred a year beyond his pay. Did you notice that Mr. Halkin, a rather sandy-haired young man with a long nose? That young fellow will come into thirty thousand a year by and by.'

'Yes, Lady Laura, I did notice him a little when he was talking to one of the Miss Dacres. He seemed very stupid.'

'Stupid, my dear Clarissa!' Why, I have been told that young man made a good deal of character at Oxford. But I daresay you are taken by Herbert Westleigh's rattling way. Now remember, my dear, I have warned you.'

'There is no occasion for any warning, Lady Laura. Believe me, I am in no danger. I thought Captain Westleigh was very kind, and I liked him because he told me all about the other people; that is all.'

'Very well, dear. You will see a good many people here; there is an advantage in that—one influence neutralises another. But I should really like you to take some notice of that Mr. Halkin. He will be a good deal here, I daresay. His family live at Selbrook Hall, only four miles off. The father and mother are the plainest, homeliest people, but very sensible; live in a quiet unpretending style, and can't spend a quarter of their income. When I speak of thirty thousand a year, I don't reckon the accumulations that young man will inherit. He is the only son. There is a sister; but she is lame and a confirmed invalid—not likely to live many years, I think.'

Clarissa smiled at Lady Laura's earnestness.

'One would think you were in league with papa, dear Lady Laura. He says I am bound to marry a rich man.'

'Of course; it is a solemn duty when a girl is handsome and not rich. Look at me: what would

my life have been without Fred, Clarissa? There were five of us, child; five daughters to be married, only think of that; and there are still three unmarried. One of my sisters is coming here to-morrow. I do so hope you will get on with her; but she is rather peculiar. I am glad to say she is engaged at last—quite an old affair, and I think an attachment on both sides for some time past; but it has only lately come to a definite engagement. The gentleman's prospects were so uncertain; but that is all over now. The death of an elder brother quite alters his position, and he will have a very fine estate by and by. He is coming here too, in a few days, and I'm sure I hope the marriage will take place soon. But I must not keep you here chattering, at the risk of spoiling your fresh looks.'

And with a gracious good-night Lady Laura dismissed her new protégée.

Yes, it was a pleasant life, certainly; a life that drifted smoothly onward with the tide, and to all seeming unshadowed by one sorrowful thought or care. And yet, no doubt, with but a few youthful exceptions, every guest at Hale Castle had his or her particular burden to carry, and black Care sat behind the gentlemen as they rode to small country meetings

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or primitive cattle-fairs. To Clarissa Lovel the state of existence was so new, that it was scarcely strange she should be deluded by the brightness and glitter of it, and believe that these people could have known no sorrow.

She found herself looking forward with unwonted interest to the arrival of Lady Laura's sister, Lady Geraldine Challoner. To a girl who has never had a lover—to whom the whole science of love is yet a profound inscrutable mystery—there is apt to be something especially interesting in the idea of an engagement. To her the thought of betrothal is wondrously solemn. A love-match too, and an attachment of long standing—there were the materials for a romance in these brief hints of Lady Laura's. And then, again, her sister described this Lady Geraldine as a peculiar person, with whom it was rather doubtful whether Clarissa would be able to get on. All this made her so much the more anxious to see the expected guest; and in the morning's drive, and the afternoon's croquet, she thought more of Lady Geraldine than of the landscape or the game.

Croquet was over—Clarissa had taken part in a regular game this afternoon—and the players were strolling about the gardens in couples, in an idle

half-hour before the first dinner-bell, when Miss Lovel met Lady Laura with another lady. They were sauntering slowly along one of the sunny gravel walks—there was every charm in this Italian garden except shade—and stopped on seeing Clarissa.

'Now, Geraldine, I shall be able to introduce you to my favourite, Clarissa Lovel,' said Lady Laura; 'Captain Westleigh you know of old.'

The Captain and Lady Geraldine shook hands, declaring that they were quite old friends—had known each other for ages, and so on; and Clarissa had a few moments' pause, in which to observe the young lady.

She was tall and slim, her sister's junior by perhaps five years, but not more; very fair, with bright auburn hair—that golden-tinted hair, of which there seems to be so much more nowadays than was to be seen twenty years ago. She was handsome—very handsome—Clarissa decided at once; but it seemed to her rather a cold hard style of beauty; the straight nose, the mouth, and chin chiseled with a clearness and distinctness that was almost sharpness; the large luminous blue eyes, which did not seem to possess much capacity for tenderness.

Lady Laura was very proud of this sister, and

perhaps just a little afraid of her; but of course that latter fact was not obvious to strangers; she was only a shade less volatile than usual in Geraldine's presence. Geraldine was the beauty of the Challoner family, and her career had been a failure hitherto; so that there was much rejoicing, in a quiet way, now that Lady Geraldine's destiny was apparently decided, and in an advantageous manner.

She was sufficiently gracious to Clarissa, but displayed none of that warmth which distinguished Lady Laura's manner to her new friend; and when the sisters had turned aside into another path, and were out of hearing, Geraldine asked rather sharply why 'that girl' was here?

'My dear Geraldine, she is perfectly charming. I have taken the greatest fancy to her.'

'My dear Laura, when will you leave off those absurd fancies for strangers?'

'Clarissa Lovel is not a stranger; you must remember how intimate papa used to be with her father.'

'I only remember that Mr. Lovel was a very selfish person, and that he has lost his estate and gone down in the world. Why should you trouble yourself about his daughter? You can only do the

girl harm by bringing her here; she will have to go out as a governess, I daresay, and will be writing to you whenever she is out of a situation to ask some favour or other, and boring you to death. I cannot think how you can be so inconsiderate as to entangle yourself with that kind of acquaintance.'

'I don't mean Clarissa to be a governess; I mean her to make a good marriage.'

'O, of course it is very easy to say that,' exclaimed Lady Geraldine scornfully; 'but you have not been so fortunate as a match-maker hitherto. Look at Emily and Louisa.'

'Emily and Louisa were so intractable and difficult to please, that I could do nothing for them; and now I look upon them as confirmed old maids. But it is a different thing with Clarissa. She is very sensible; and I do not think she would stand in her own light if I could bring about what I wish. And then she is so lovely. Emily and Louisa were good-looking enough half a dozen years ago, but this girl is simply perfect. Come, Geraldine, you can afford to praise her. Is she not lovely?'

'Yes, I suppose she is handsome,' the other answered icily.

'You suppose she is handsome! It is really too

bad of you to be prejudiced against a girl I wanted you to like. As if this poor little Clarissa could do anybody any harm! But never mind, she must do without your liking. And now tell me all about George Fairfax. I was so glad to hear your news, dear—so thoroughly rejoiced.'

'There is no occasion for such profound gladness. I could have gone on existing very well as Geraldine Challoner.'

'Of course; but I had much rather see you well married, and your own mistress; and this is such a good match.'

'Yes; from a worldly point of view, I suppose, the affair is unexceptionable,' Geraldine Challoner answered, with persistent indifference; simulated indifference, no doubt, but not the less provoking to her sister. 'George will be rich by and by, and he is well enough off now. We shall be able to afford a house in one of the streets out of Park-lane—I have a rooted detestation for both Belgravia and Tyburnia—and a carriage, and so on; and I shall not be worried as I have been about my milliner's bills.'

'And then you are very fond of him, Geraldine,' Lady Laura said softly.

There were still little romantic impulses in the

matron's heart, and this studied coldness of her sister's tone wounded her.

'Yes, of course that is the beginning of the business. We like each other very well,' Lady Geraldine replied, still with the same unenthusiastic air. 'I think there has always been some kind of liking between us. We suit each other very well, you see; have the same way of thinking about most things, take the same view of life, and so on.'

Lady Laura gave a faint sigh of assent. She was disappointed by her sister's tone; for in the time past she had more than once suspected that Geraldine Challoner loved George Fairfax with a passionate half-despairing love, which, if unrequited, might make the bane of her life. And, lo! here was the same Geraldine discussing her engagement as coolly as if the match had been the veriest marriage of convenience ever planned by a designing dowager. She did not understand how much pride had to do with this reticence, or what volcanic depths may sometimes lie beneath the Alpine snows of such a nature as Geraldine Challoner's.

In the evening Lady Geraldine was the centre of a circle of old friends and admirers; and Clarissa could only observe her from a distance, and wonder

at her brilliancy, her power to talk of anything and everything with an air of unlimited wisdom and experience, and the perfect ease with which she received the homage offered to her beauty and wit. The cold proud face lighted up wonderfully at night, and under the softening influence of so much adulation; and Lady Geraldine's smiles, though wanting in warmth at the best, were very fascinating. Clarissa wondered that so radiant a creature could have been so long unmarried, that it could be matter for rejoicing that she was at last engaged. It must have been her own fault, of course; such a woman as this could have been a duchess if she pleased, Clarissa thought.

Lizzy Fermor came up to her while she was admiring the high-bred beauty.

'Well, Miss Lovel, what do you think of her?'

'Lady Geraldine? I think she is wonderfully handsome—and fascinating.'

'Do you? Then I don't think you can know the meaning of the word "fascination." If I were a man, that woman would be precisely the last in the world to touch my heart. O yes, I admit that she is very handsome—classic profile, bright blue eyes, complexion of lilies and roses, real golden hair—not dyed, you know—and so on; but I should as soon think of

falling in love with a statue of snow as with Lady Geraldine Challoner. I think she has just about as much heart as the statue would have.'

'Those people with cold manners have sometimes very warm hearts,' Clarissa remonstrated, feeling that gratitude to Lady Laura made it incumbent on her to defend Lady Laura's sister.

'Perhaps; but that is not the case with her. She would trample upon a hecatomb of hearts to arrive at the object of her ambition. I think she might have made more than one brilliant marriage since she has been out—something like ten years, you know—only she was too cold, too obviously mercenary. I am very sorry for George Fairfax.'

'Do you know him?'

'Yes, and he is a very noble fellow. He has been rather wild, I believe; but of course we are not supposed to know anything about that; and I have heard that he is the most generous-hearted of men. I know Lady Geraldine has contrived to keep him dangling about her whenever he was in England for the last six or eight years; but I thought it was one of those old-established flirtations that would never come to anything — a kind of institution. I was quite surprised to hear of their engagement—and very sorry.'

'But Lady Geraldine is very much attached to him, is she not?'

'O yes, I daresay she likes him; it would be almost difficult for any one to avoid liking him. She used to do her utmost to keep him about her always, I know; and I believe the flirtation has cost her more than one chance of a good marriage. But I doubt if we should have ever heard of this engagement if Reginald Fairfax had not died, and left his brother the heir of Lyvedon.'

'Is Lyvedon a very grand place?'

'It is a fine estate, I believe; a noble old house in Kent, with considerable extent of land attached to it. The place belongs now to Sir Spencer Lyvedon, an old bachelor, whose only sister is George Fairfax's mother. The property is sure to come to Mr. Fairfax in a few years. He is to be here to-morrow, they say; and you will see him, and be able to judge for yourself whether Lady Geraldine is worthy of him.'

There was a little excursion proposed and planned that evening for the next day — a drive to Marley Wood, a delicious bit of forest about seven miles from the Castle, and a luncheon in the open air. The party was made up on the spot. There were ladies enough to fill two carriages; a couple of servants were

to go first with the luncheon in a wagonette, and the gentlemen were to ride. Everybody was delighted with the idea. It was one of those unpremeditated affairs which are sure to be a success.

'I am glad to have something to do with myself,' said Lady Geraldine. 'It is better than dawdling away one's existence at croquet.'

'I hope you are not going to be dull here, Geraldine,' replied Lady Laura. 'There are the Helston races next week, and a flower-show at Holborough.'

'I hate small country race-meetings and country flower-shows; but of course I am not going to be dull, Laura. The Castle is very nice; and I shall hear all about your last new protégées, and your Dorcas societies, and your model cottages, and your architect, and your hundred-and-one schemes for the benefit of your fellow-man. It is not possible to be dull in the presence of so much energy.'

CHAPTER VI.

AND THIS IS GEORGE FAIRFAX.

THE next day was lovely. There seemed, indeed, no possibility of variation in the perfection of this summer weather; and Clarissa Lovel felt her spirits as light as if the unknown life before her had been all brightness, unshadowed by one dread or care. The party for Marley Wood started about an hour after breakfast—Lady Laura, Mrs. Dacre, Barbara Fermor, and Clarissa, in one carriage; two Miss Dacres, Lady Geraldine, and Mrs. Wilmot in the other; Lizzy Fermor and Rose Dacre on horseback; with a small detachment of gentlemen in attendance upon them. There were wide grassy waste-lands on each side of the road almost all the way to the wood, on which the equestrian party could disport themselves, without much inconvenience from the dust of the two carriages. Once arrived at the wood, there were botan-

ising, fern-hunting, sketching, and flirtation without limit. Lady Laura was quite happy, discussing her Dorcas societies and the ingratitude of her model cottagers, with Mrs. Dacre; Lady Geraldine sat at the foot of a great shining beech, with her white dress set off by a background of scarlet shawl, and her hat lying on the grass beside her. She seemed too listless to ramble about with the rest of the party, or to take the faintest interest in the conversation of any of the gentlemen who tried to talk to her. She amused herself in a desultory way with a drawing-book and a volume of a novel, and did not appear to consider it incumbent on her to take notice of any one.

Clarissa and Barbara Fermor wandered away into the heart of the wood, attended by the indefatigable Captain Westleigh, and sketched little bits of fern and undergrowth in their miniature sketch-books, much to the admiration of the Captain, who declared that Clarissa had a genius for landscape. 'As you have for croquet and for everything else, I think,' he said; 'only you are so quiet about your resources. But I am very glad you have not that grand sultana manner of Lady Geraldine Challoner's. I really can't think how any man can stand it, especially such a man as George Fairfax.'

'Why "especially"?' asked Miss Fermor curiously.

'Well, I don't know exactly how to explain my meaning to a lady—because he has knocked about the world a good deal—seen a great deal of life, in short. *Il a vecu*, as the French say. He is not the kind of man to be any woman's slave, I should think; he knows too much of the sex for that. He would take matters with rather a high hand, I should fancy. And then Lady Geraldine, though she is remarkably handsome, and all that kind of thing, is not in the first freshness of her youth. She is nearly as old as George, I should say; and when a woman is the same age as a man, it is her misfortune to seem much older. No, Miss Fermor, upon my word, I don't consider them fairly matched.'

'The lady has rank,' said Barbara Fermor.

'Yes, of course. It will be Mr. and Lady Geraldine Fairfax. There are some men who care for that kind of thing; but I don't suppose George is one of them. The Fairfaxes are of a noble old Scotch family, you know, and hold themselves equal to any of our nobility.'

'When is Mr. Fairfax expected at the Castle?'

'Not till to-night. He is to come by the last

train, I believe. You may depend Lady Geraldine would not be here if there were any chance of his arriving in the middle of the day. She will keep him up to collar, you may be sure. I shouldn't like to be engaged to a woman armed with the experience of a decade of London seasons. It must be tight work!'

A shrill bell, pealing gaily through the wood, summoned them to luncheon; a fairy banquet spread upon the grass under a charmed circle of beeches; chicken-pies and lobster-salads, mayonaise of salmon and daintily-glazed cutlets in paper frills, inexhaustible treasure of pound-cake and strawberries and cream, with a pyramid of hothouse pines and peaches in the centre of the turf-spread banquet. And for the wines, there were no effervescent compounds from the laboratory of the wine-chemist—Lady Laura's guests were not thirsty cockneys, requiring to be refreshed by 'fizz'—but delicate amber-tinted vintages of the Rhineland, which seemed too ethereal to intoxicate, and yet were dangerous. And for the more thirsty souls there were curiously compounded 'cups:' hock and seltzer; claret and soda-water, fortified with curaçoa and flavoured artistically with burrage or sliced pine-apple.

The banquet was a merry one; and it was nearly four o'clock when the ladies had done trifling with strawberries and cream, and the gentlemen had suspended their homage to the Rhineland. Then came a still more desultory wandering of couples to and fro among the shadowy intricacies of the wood; and Clarissa having for once contrived to get rid of the inevitable Captain, who had been beguiled away to inspect some remote grotto under convoy of Barbara Fermor, was free to wander alone whither she pleased. She was rather glad to be alone for a little. Marley Wood was not new to her. It had been a favourite spot of her brother Austin's, and the two had spent many a pleasant day beneath the umbrage of those old forest-trees; she sitting and reading, neither of them talking very much, only in a spasmodic way, when Austin was suddenly moved by some caprice to pour out his thoughts into the ear of his little sister —strange bitter thoughts they were sometimes; but the girl listened as to the inspirations of genius. Here he had taught her almost all that she had ever learned of landscape art. She had only improved by long practice upon those early simple lessons. She was glad to be alone, for these old memories were sad ones. She wandered quite away from the rest, and,

sitting down upon a bank that sloped towards a narrow streamlet, began to sketch stray tufts and clusters of weedy undergrowth—a straggling blackberry-branch, a bit of ivy creeping sinuously along the uneven ground—in an absent desultory way, thinking of her brother and the days gone by. She had been alone like this about half an hour, when the crackling of the brambles near her warned her of an approaching footstep. She looked up, and saw a stranger approaching her through the sunlight and shadows of the wood—a tall man, in a loose gray overcoat.

A stranger? No. As he came nearer to her, the face seemed very familiar; and yet in that first moment she could not imagine where she had seen him. A little nearer, and she remembered all at once. This was her companion of the long railway journey from London to Holborough. She blushed at the recollection, not altogether displeased to see him again, and yet remembering bitterly that cruel mistake she had made about Arden Court. She might be able to explain her error now, if he should recognise her and stop to speak; but that was scarcely likely. He had forgotten her utterly, no doubt, by this time.

She went on with her sketching—a trailing spray

of Irish ivy, winding away and losing itself in a confusion of bramble and fern, every leaf sharply defined by the light pencil-touches, with loving pre-Raphaelite care—she went on, trying to think that it was not the slightest consequence to her whether this man remembered their brief acquaintance of the railway-carriage. And yet she would have been wounded, ever so little, if he had forgotten her. She knew so few people, that this accidental acquaintance seemed almost a friend. He had known her brother, too; and there had been something in his manner that implied an interest in her fate.

She bent a little lower over the sketch-book, doing her uttermost not to be seen, perhaps all the more because she really did wish for the opportunity of explaining that mistake about Arden Court. Her face was almost hidden under the coquettish gray hat, as she bent over her drawing; but the gentleman came on towards her with evident purpose. It was only to make an inquiry, however.

'I am looking for a picnic party,' he said. 'I discovered the *débris* of a luncheon yonder, but no human creature visible. Perhaps you can kindly tell me where the strayed revellers are to be found; you are one of them, perhaps?'

Clarissa looked up at him, blushing furiously, and very much ashamed of herself for the weakness, and then went on with her drawing in a nervous way, as she answered him,

'Yes, I am with Lady Laura Armstrong's party; but I really cannot tell you where to look for them all. They are roaming about in every direction, I believe.'

'Good gracious me!' cried the gentleman, coming a good deal nearer—stepping hastily across the streamlet, in fact, which had divided him from Clarissa hitherto. 'Have I really the pleasure of speaking to Miss Lovel? This is indeed a surprise. I scarcely expected ever to see you again.'

'Nor I to see you,' Clarissa answered, recovering herself a little by this time, and speaking with her accustomed frankness. 'And I have been very anxious to see you again.'

'Indeed!' cried the gentleman eagerly.

'In order to explain a mistake I made that night in the railway-carriage, in speaking of Arden Court. I talked of the place as if it had still belonged to papa; I did not know that he had sold it, and fancied I was going home there. It was only when I saw

my uncle that I learnt the truth. You must have thought it very strange.'

'I was just a little mystified, I confess, for I had dined at the Court with Mr. Granger.'

'Papa had sold the dear old place, and, disliking the idea of writing such unpleasant news, had told me nothing about the sale. It was not wise, of course; but he felt the loss of Arden so keenly, I can scarcely wonder that he could not bring himself to write about it.'

'It would have been better to have spared you, though,' the unknown answered gravely. 'I daresay you were as fond of the old home as ever your father could have been?'

'I don't think it would be possible for any one to love Arden better than I. But then, of course, a man is always prouder than a woman—'

'I am not so sure of that,' the stranger muttered parenthetically.

'—And papa felt the degradation involved in the loss.'

'I won't admit of any degradation in the case. A gentleman is none the less a gentleman for having spent his fortune rather recklessly, and the old blood is no less pure without the old acres. If your father

were a wise man, he might be happier now than he has ever been. The loss of a great estate is the loss of a bundle of cares.'

'I daresay that is very good philosophy,' Clarissa answered, smiling, beguiled from painful thoughts by the lightness of his tone; 'but I doubt if it applies to all cases—not to papa's, certainly.'

'You were sketching, I see, when I interrupted you. I remember you told me that night of your fondness for art. May I see what you were doing?'

'It is hardly worth showing you. I was only amusing myself, sketching at random—that ivy straggling along there, or anything that caught my eye.'

'But that sort of thing indicates so much. I see you have a masterly touch for so young an artist. I won't say anything hackneyed about so fair a one; for women are showing us nowadays that there are no regions of art closed against them. Well, it is a divine amusement, and a glorious profession.'

There was a little pause after this, during which Clarissa looked at her watch, and finding it nearly five o'clock, began to put up her pencils and drawing-book.

'I did not think that you knew Lady Laura Arm-

strong,' she said; and then blushed for the speech, remembering that, as she knew absolutely nothing about himself or his belongings, the circumstance of her ignorance on this one point was by no means surprising.

'No; nor did I expect to meet you here,' replied the gentleman. 'And yet I might almost have done so, knowing that you lived at Arden. But, you see, it is so long since we met, and I—'

'Had naturally forgotten me.'

'No, I had not forgotten you, Miss Lovel, nor would it have been natural for me to forget you. I am very glad to meet you again under such agreeable auspices. You are going to stay at the Castle a long time, I hope. I am booked for an indefinite visit.'

'O no, I don't suppose I shall stay very long. Lady Laura is extremely kind; but this is my first visit, and she must have many friends who have a greater claim upon her hospitality.'

'Hale Castle is a large place, and I am sure Lady Laura has always room for agreeable guests.'

'She is very, very kind. You have known her a long time, perhaps?'

'Yes, I have been intimate with the Challoners ever since I was a boy. Lady Laura was always

charming; but I think her marriage with Fred Armstrong—who worships the ground she walks on—and the possession of Hale Castle have made her absolutely perfect.'

'And you know her sister Lady Geraldine, of course?'

'O yes, I know Geraldine.'

'Do you know Mr. Fairfax, the gentleman to whom she is engaged?'

'Well, yes; I am supposed to have some knowledge of that individual.'

Something in his smile, and a certain significance in his tone, let in a sudden light upon Clarissa's mind.

'I am afraid I am asking very foolish questions,' she said. 'You are Mr. Fairfax?'

'Yes, I am George Fairfax. I forgot that I had omitted to tell you my name that night.'

'And I had no idea that I was speaking to Mr. Fairfax. You were not expected till quite late this evening.'

'No; but I found my business in London easier to manage than I had supposed it would be; so, as in duty bound, I came down here directly I found myself free. When I arrived at the Castle, I was

told of this picnic, and rode off at once to join the party.'

'And I am keeping you here, when you ought to be looking for your friends.'

'There is no hurry. I have done my duty, and am here; that is the grand point. Shall we go and look for them together?'

'If you like. I daresay we shall be returning to the Castle very soon.'

They sauntered slowly away, in and out among the trees, towards a grassy glade, where there was more open space for walking, and where the afternoon sun shone warmly on the smooth turf.

'I hope you get on very well with Geraldine?' Mr. Fairfax said presently.

It was almost the same phrase Lady Laura had used about her sister.

'I have seen so little of her yet,' Clarissa answered, rather embarrassed by this inquiry. 'I should like to know her very much; but she only arrived yesterday, and we have scarcely spoken half-a-dozen words to each other yet.'

'You will hardly like her at first, perhaps,' Mr. Fairfax went on, doubtfully. 'People who don't know much of her are apt to fancy her cold and

proud; but to those whom she really likes she is all that is charming, and I don't think she can fail to like you.'

'You are very kind to say so. I hope she may like me. Do you know, I have been so much interested in Lady Geraldine from the first, before I saw her even—partly, perhaps, because her sister told me about her engagement. You will think that very romantic and silly, I daresay.'

'Not at all; a young lady is bound to be interested in that kind of thing. And I hope your interest in Lady Geraldine was not lessened when you did see her.'

'It could scarcely be that. No one could help admiring her.'

'Yes, she is very handsome, there is no question about that; she has been an acknowledged beauty ever since she came out. I think I can catch a glimpse of her yonder among the trees; I see a white dress and a scarlet shawl. Geraldine always had a penchant for scarlet draperies.'

'Yes, that is Lady Geraldine.'

They hastened their steps a little, and came presently to the circle of beeches where they had lunched, and where most of the party were now as-

sembled, preparing for the return journey. Lady Geraldine was sauntering to and fro with Major Mason, listening with a somewhat indifferent air to that gentleman's discourse.

She caught sight of her lover the moment he appeared; and Clarissa saw the statuesque face light up with a faint flush of pleasure that brightened it wonderfully. But however pleased she might be, Lady Geraldine Challoner was the last of women to demonstrate her pleasure in her lover's arrival by any overt act. She received him with the tranquil grace of an empress, who sees only one courtier more approach the steps of her throne. They shook hands placidly, after Mr. Fairfax had shaken hands and talked for two or three minutes with Lady Laura Armstrong, who welcomed him with considerable warmth.

The major dropped quietly away from Lady Geraldine's side, and the plighted lovers strolled under the trees for a little, pending the signal for the return.

'So you know Miss Lovel?' Geraldine said, with an icy air of surprise, as soon as she and George Fairfax were alone.

'I can hardly say that I know her; our acquaintance is the merest accident,' answered Mr. Fairfax; and then proceeded to relate his railway adventure.

'How very odd that she should travel alone!'

'Scarcely so odd, when you remember the fact of her father's poverty. He could not be supposed to find a maid for his daughter.'

'But he might be supposed to take some care of her. He ought not to have allowed her to travel alone—at night too.'

'It was careless and imprudent, no doubt. Happily she came to no harm. She was spared from any encounter with a travelling swell-mobsman, who would have garrotted her for the sake of her watch and purse, or an insolent bagman, who would have made himself obnoxiously agreeable on account of her pretty face.'

'I suppose she has been in the habit of going about the world by herself. That accounts for her rather strong-minded air.'

'Do you find her strong-minded? I should have thought her quite gentle and womanly.'

'I really know nothing about her; and I must not say anything against her. She is Laura's last protégée; and you know, when my sister takes any one up, it is always a case of rapture.'

After this the lovers began to talk about themselves, or rather George Fairfax talked about himself,

giving a detailed account of his proceedings since last they had met.

'I went down to see my uncle,' he said, 'the day before yesterday. He is at Lyvedon, and I had a good look at the old house. Really it is the dearest old place in the world, Geraldine, and I should like above all things to live there by and by when the estate is ours. I don't think we are likely to wait very long. The poor old man is awfully shaky. He was very good to me, dear old boy, and asked all manner of kind questions about you. I think I have quite won his heart by my engagement; he regards it as a pledge of my reform.'

'I am glad he is pleased,' replied Lady Geraldine, in a tone that was just a shade more gracious than that in which she had spoken of Clarissa.

The summons to the carriages came almost immediately. Mr. Fairfax conducted his betrothed to her seat in the barouche, and then mounted his horse to ride back to the Castle beside her. He rode by the side of the carriage all the way, indifferent to dust; but there was not much talk between the lovers during that homeward progress, and Clarissa fancied there was a cloud upon Mr. Fairfax's countenance.

CHAPTER VII.

DANGEROUS GROUND.

LIFE was very pleasant at Hale Castle. About that one point there could be no shadow of doubt. Clarissa wondered at the brightness of her new existence; began to wonder vaguely by and by what it was that made it seem brighter every day. There was the usual round of amusements—dinner-parties, amateur concerts, races, flower-shows, excursions to every point of interest within a day's drive, a military ball at the garrison-town twenty miles off, perennial croquet, and gossip, and afternoon tea-drinking in arbours or marquees in the gardens, and unlimited flirtation. It was impossible for the most exacting visitor to be dull. There was always something.

And to Clarissa all these things possessed the charm of freshness. She was puzzled beyond measure by the indifference, real or simulated, of the girls who had seen half-a-dozen London seasons; the

frequent declarations that these delights only bored them, that this or that party was a failure. George Fairfax watched her bright face sometimes, interested in spite of himself by her freshness.

'What a delicious thing youth is!' he said to himself. 'Even if that girl were less completely lovely than she is, she would still be most charming. If Geraldine were only like that—only fresh and candid and pure, and susceptible to every new emotion! But there is an impassable gulf of ten years between them. Geraldine is quite as handsome—in her own particular style—and she talks much better than Clarissa Lovel, and is more clever, no doubt; and yet there are some men who would be bewitched by that girl before they knew where they were.'

Very often after this Mr. Fairfax fell a-musing upon those apocryphal men who might be subjugated by the charms of Miss Lovel.

When did he awaken to the fatal truth that those charms were exercising a most potent influence upon his own mind? When did he open his eyes for the first time to behold his danger?

Not yet. He was really attached to Geraldine Challoner. Her society had been a kind of habit with him for several years of his life. She had been more

admired than any woman he knew, and it was, in some sort, a triumph to have won her. That he never would have won her but for his brother's death he knew very well, and accepted the fact as a matter of course; a mere necessity of the world in which they lived, not as evidence of a mercenary spirit in the lady. He knew that no woman could better discharge the duties of an elevated station, or win him more social renown. To marry Geraldine Challoner was to secure for his house the stamp of fashion, for every detail of his domestic life a warrant of good taste. She had a kind of power over him too, an influence begun long ago, which had never yet been oppressive to him. And he took these things for love. He had been in love with other women during his long alliance with Lady Geraldine, and had shown more ardour in the pursuit of other flames than he had ever evinced in his courtship of her; but these more passionate attachments had come, for the most part, to a sorry end; and now he told himself that Geraldine suited him better than any other woman in the world.

'I have outgrown all foolish notions,' he said to himself, believing that the capacity was dead within him for that blind unreasoning passion which poets

of the Byronic school have made of love. 'What I want is a wife; a wife of my own rank, or a little above me in rank; a wife who will be true and loyal to me, who knows the world well enough to forgive my antecedents, and to be utterly silent about them, and who will help me to make a position for myself in the future. A man must be something in this world. It is a hard thing that one cannot live one's own life; but it seems inevitable somehow.'

His mother had helped not a little to the bringing about of this engagement. She knew that her son's bachelor life had been at best a wild one; not so bad as it was supposed to be, of course, since nothing in this world ever is so bad as the rest of the world supposes it; and she was very anxious to see him safely moored in the sheltered harbour of matrimony. She was a proud woman, and she was pleased that her son should have an earl's daughter for his wife; and beyond this there was the fact that she liked Lady Geraldine. The girl who had been too proud to let the man she loved divine the depth of her feeling, had not been too proud to exhibit her fondness for his mother. There had grown up a warm friendship between these two women; and Mrs. Fairfax's influence had done much, almost unknown

to her son, to bring about this result of his chronic flirtation with Geraldine Challoner.

Just at present he was very well satisfied with the fact of his engagement, believing that he had taken the best possible means for securing his future happiness; an equable, quiet sort of happiness, of course —he was nearly thirty, and had outlived the possibility of anything more than that. It would have bored him to suppose that Geraldine expected more from him than this tranquil kind of worship. Perhaps the lady understood this, and schooled herself to a colder tone than was even natural to her, rather than be supposed for one moment to be the more deeply attached of the two.

Thus it happened that Mr. Fairfax was not severely taxed in his capacity of plighted lover. However exacting Lady Geraldine may have been by nature, she was too proud to demand more exclusive attention than her betrothed spontaneously rendered; indeed, she took pains to let him perceive that he was still in full enjoyment of all his old bachelor liberty. So the days drifted by very pleasantly, and George Fairfax found himself in Clarissa Lovel's society perhaps a little oftener than was well for either of those two.

He was very kind to her; he seemed to understand her better than other people, she thought; and his companionship was more to her than that of any one else—a most delightful relief after Captain Westleigh's incessant frivolity, or Mr. Halkin's solemn small-talk. In comparison with these men, he appeared to such wonderful advantage. Her nature expanded in his society, and she could talk to him as she talked to no one else.

He used to wonder at her eloquence sometimes, as the beautiful face glowed, and the dark hazel eyes brightened; he wondered not a little also at the extent of her reading, which had been wide and varied during that quiet winter and spring-time at Mill Cottage.

'What a learned lady you are!' he said, smiling at her enthusiasm one day, when they had been talking of Italy and Dante; 'your close knowledge of the poet puts my poor smattering to shame. Happily, an idler and a worldling like myself is not supposed to know much. I was never patient enough to be a profound reader; and if I cannot tear the heart out of a book, I am apt to throw it aside in disgust. But you must have read a great deal; and yet when we met, less than a year ago, you confessed to being only

a schoolgirl fresh from grinding away at Corneille and Racine.'

'I have had the advantage of papa's help since then,' answered Clarissa, 'and he is very clever. He does not read many authors, but those he does care for he reads with all his heart. He taught me to appreciate Dante, and to make myself familiar with the history of his age, in order to understand him better.'

'Very wise of him, no doubt. And that kind of studious life with your papa is very pleasant to you, I suppose, Miss Lovel?'

'Yes,' she answered thoughtfully; 'I have been quite happy with papa. Some people might fancy the life dull perhaps, but it has scarcely seemed so to me. Of course it is very different from life here; but I suppose one would get tired of such a perpetual round of pleasure as Lady Laura provides for us.'

'I should imagine so. Life in a country-house full of delightful people must be quite intolerable beyond a certain limit. One so soon gets tired of one's best friends. I think that is why people travel so much nowadays. It is the only polite excuse for being alone.'

The time came when Clarissa began to fancy that

her visit had lasted long enough, and that, in common decency, she was bound to depart; but on suggesting as much to Lady Laura, that kindly hostess declared she could not possibly do without her dearest Clarissa for ever so long.

'Indeed, I don't know how I shall ever get on without you, my dear,' she said; 'we suit each other so admirably, you see. Why, I shall have no one to read Tasso with—no one to help me with my Missal when you are gone.'

Miss Lovel's familiar knowledge of Italian literature, and artistic tastes, had been altogether delightful to Lady Laura; who was always trying to improve herself, as she called it, and travelled from one pursuit to another, with a laudable perseverance, but an unhappy facility for forgetting one accomplishment in the cultivation of another. Thus by a vigorous plunge into Spanish and Calderon this year, she was apt to obliterate the profound impression created by Dante and Tasso last year. Her music suffered by reason of a sudden ardour for illumination; or art went to the wall because a London musical season and an enthusiastic admiration of Hallé had inspired her with a desire to cultivate a more classic style of pianoforte-playing. So in her English reading, each

new book blotted out its predecessor. Travels, histories, essays, biographies, flitted across the lady's brain like the coloured shadows of a magic-lantern, leaving only a lingering patch of picture here and there. To be versatile was Lady Laura's greatest pride, and courteous friends had gratified her by treating her as an authority upon all possible subjects. Nothing delighted her so much as to be appealed to with a preliminary 'Now you who read so much, Lady Laura, will understand this;' or, 'Dear Lady Laura, you who know everything, must tell me why,' &c.; or to be told by a painter, 'You who are an artist yourself can of course see this, Lady Laura;' or to be complimented by a musician as a soul above the dull mass of mankind, a sympathetic spirit, to whom the mysteries of harmony are a familiar language.

In that luxurious morning-room of Lady Laura's Clarissa generally spent the first two hours after breakfast. Here the children used to come with French and German governesses, in all the freshness of newly-starched cambric and newly-crimped tresses, to report progress as to their studies and general behaviour to their mother; who was apt to get tired of them in something less than a quarter of an hour,

and to dispatch them with kisses and praises to the distant schoolrooms and nurseries where these young exotics were enjoying the last improvements in the forcing system.

Geraldine Challoner would sometimes drop into this room for a few minutes at the time of the children's visit, and would converse not unkindly with her nephews and nieces; but for her sister's accomplishments she displayed a profound indifference, not to say contempt. She was not herself given to the cultivation of these polite arts—nothing could ever induce her to play or sing in public. She read a good deal, but rarely talked about books—it was difficult indeed to say what Lady Geraldine did talk about—yet in the art of conversation, when she chose to please, Geraldine Challoner infinitely surpassed the majority of women in her circle. Perhaps this may have been partly because she was a good listener; and, in some measure, on account of that cynical, mocking spirit in which she regarded most things, and which was apt to pass for wit.

Clarissa had been a month at Hale Castle already; but she stayed on at the urgent desire of her hostess, much too happy in that gay social life to oppose that lady's will.

'If you really, really wish to have me, dear Lady Laura,' she said; 'but you have been so kind already, and I have stayed so long, that I begin to feel myself quite an intruder.'

'You silly child! I do really, really wish to have you. I should like to keep you with me always, if I could. You suit me so much better than any of my sisters; they are the most provoking girls in the world, I think, for being uninterested in my pursuits. And your Italian is something wonderful. I have not opened my dictionary since we have been reading together. And beyond all that, I have a very particular reason for wishing you to be here next month.'

'Why next month, Lady Laura?'

'I am not going to tell you that.'

'But you quite mystify me.'

'I mean to mystify you. No, it's not the least use asking questions, Clary; but mind, you must not tease me any more about running away: that is understood.'

In all this time Clarissa had not found herself any nearer to that desired result of getting on well with Geraldine Challoner. That lady seemed quite as far away from her after a month's acquaintance as she had seemed at the very first. It was not that

Lady Geraldine was uncivil. She was polite, after her manner, to Clarissa, but never cordial; and yet she could not fail to see that George Fairfax admired and liked Miss Lovel, and she might have been supposed to wish to think well of any one he liked.

Was she jealous of Clarissa? Well, no, it scarcely seemed possible to associate the fever of jealousy with that serene temperament. She had an air of complete security in all her intercourse with George Fairfax, which was hardly compatible with doubt or the faintest shadow of suspicion.

If ever she did speak of Miss Lovel to her lover, or to any one else, she talked of her as a pretty country girl, and seemed to consider her as far removed, by reason of her youth and obscure position, from herself, as if they had been inhabitants of two separate worlds.

Mr. Lovel had been invited to several dinner-parties at the Castle during his daughter's visit, but was not to be drawn from his seclusion. He had no objection, however, that Clarissa should stay as long as Lady Laura cared to retain her, and wrote very cordially to that effect.

What a pleasant, idle, purposeless life it was, and how rapidly it drifted by for Clarissa! She wondered

to find herself so happy; wondered what the charm was which made life so new and sweet, which made her open her eyes on the morning sunshine with such a glad eagerness to greet the beginning of another day, and filled up every hour with such a perfect sense of contentment.

She wondered at this happiness only in a vague dreamy way, not taking much trouble to analyse her feelings. It was scarcely strange that she should be completely happy in a life so different from her dull existence at home. The freshness and beauty of all these pleasant things would be worn off in time, no doubt, and she would become just like those other young women, with their experience of many seasons, and their perpetual complaint of being bored; but just now, while the freshness lasted, everything delighted her.

Clarissa had been more than six weeks at the Castle, while other visitors had come and gone, and the round of country-house gaieties had been unbroken. The Fermors still lingered on, and languidly deprecated the length of their visit, without any hint of actual departure. Captain Westleigh had gone back to his military duties, very much in love with Miss Lovel. He plaintively protested, in his confid-

ences with a few chosen friends, against a Providence which had made them both penniless.

'I don't suppose I shall ever meet such a girl again,' he would declare piteously. 'More than once I was on the point of making her an offer; the words were almost out, you know; for I don't go in for making a solemn business of the thing, with a lot of preliminary palaver. If a fellow really likes a girl, he doesn't want to preach a sermon in order to let her know it; and ever so many times, when we've been playing croquet, or when I've been hanging about the piano with her of an evening, I've been on the point of saying, "Upon my word, Miss Lovel, I think we two are eminently suited to each other, don't you?" or something plain and straightforward of that kind; and then I've remembered that her father can't give her a sixpence, which, taken in conjunction with my own financial condition, would mean starvation!'

'And do you think she liked you?' a curious friend would perhaps inquire.

'Well, I don't know. She might do worse, you see. As a rule, girls generally do like me. I don't see why there should be any difference in her case.'

Nor did the Captain for a moment imagine that

Clarissa would have rejected him, had he been in a position to make an offer of his hand.

Lady Geraldine was a fixture at Hale. She was to stay there till her marriage, with the exception, perhaps, of a brief excursion to London for millinery purposes, Lady Laura told Clarissa. But the date of the marriage had not yet been settled—had been, indeed, only discussed in the vaguest manner, and the event seemed still remote.

'It will be some time this year, I suppose,' Lady Laura said; 'but beyond that I can really say nothing. Geraldine is so capricious; and perhaps George Fairfax may not be in a great hurry to give up his bachelor privileges. He is very different from Fred, who worried me into marrying him six weeks after he proposed. And in this case a long engagement seems so absurd, when you consider that they have known each other for ten years. I shall really be very glad when the business is over, for I never feel quite sure of Geraldine.'

CHAPTER VIII.

SMOULDERING FIRES.

With the beginning of August there came a change in the weather. High winds, gloom, and rain succeeded that brilliant cloudless summer-time, which had become, as it were, the normal condition of the universe; and Lady Laura's guests were fain to abandon their picnics and forest excursions, their botanical researches and distant race-meetings—nay, even croquet itself, that perennial source of recreation for the youthful mind, had to be given up, except in the most fitful snatches. In this state of things, amateur concerts and acted charades came into fashion. The billiard-room was crowded from breakfast till dinner-time. It was a charmingly composite apartment—having one long wall lined with book-shelves, sacred to the most frivolous ephemeral literature, and a grand piano in an arched

recess at one end of the room—and in wet weather was the chosen resort of every socially-disposed guest at Hale. Here Clarissa learned to elevate her pretty little hand into the approved form of bridge, and acquired some acquaintance with the mysteries of cannons and pockets. It was Mr. Fairfax who taught her billiards. Lady Geraldine dropped into the room now and then, and played a game in a dashing off-hand way with her lover, amidst the admiring comments of her friends; but she did not come very often, and Mr. Fairfax had plenty of time for Clarissa's instruction.

Upon one of these wet days he insisted upon looking over her portfolio of drawings; and in going through a heap of careless sketches they came upon something of her brother Austin's. They were sitting in the library,—a very solemn and splendid chamber, with a carved oak roof and deep mullioned windows, a room that was less used than any other apartment in the Castle. Mr. Fairfax had caught Miss Lovel here, with her portfolio open on the table before her, copying a drawing of Piranesi's; so there could be no better opportunity for inspecting the sketches, which she had hitherto refused to show him.

That sketch of Austin's—a group of Arab horsemen done in pen and ink—set them talking about him at once; and George Fairfax told Clarissa all he could tell her about his intercourse with her brother.

'I really liked him so much,' he said gently, seeing how deeply she was moved by the slightest mention of that name. 'I cannot say that I ever knew him intimately, that I can claim to have been his friend; but I used at one time to see a good deal of him, and I was very much impressed by his genius. I never met a young man who gave me a stronger notion of undisciplined genius; but, unhappily, there was a recklessness about him which I can easily imagine would lead him into dangerous associations. I was told that he had quarrelled with his family, and meant to sell out, and take to painting as a profession,—and I really believe that he would have made his fortune as a painter; but when I heard of him next, he had gone abroad—to the colonies, some one said. I could never learn anything more precise than that.'

'I would give the world to know where he is,' said Clarissa mournfully; 'but I dare not ask papa anything about him, even if he could tell me, which

I doubt very much. I did try to speak of him once; but it was no use—papa would not hear his name.'

'That seems very hard; and yet your father must have been proud of him and fond of him once, I should think.'

'I am not sure of that. Papa and Austin never seemed to get on quite well together. There was always something—as if there had been some kind of hidden resentment, some painful feeling in the mind of each. I was too young to be a competent judge, of course; but I know, as a child, I had always a sense that there was a cloud between those two, a shadow that seemed to darken our lives.'

They talked for a long time of this prodigal son; and this kind of conversation seemed to bring them nearer to each other than anything else that had happened within the six weeks of their acquaintance.

'If ever I have any opportunity of finding out your brother's whereabouts, Miss Lovel, you may be sure that I will use every effort to get you some tidings of him. I don't want to say anything that might lead to your being disappointed; but when I go to town again, I will hunt up a man who used to be one of his friends, and try to learn something.

Only you must promise me not to be disappointed if I fail.'

'I won't promise that; but I promise to bear my disappointment quietly, and to be grateful to you for your goodness,' Clarissa answered, with a faint smile.

They went on with the inspection of the drawings, in which Mr. Fairfax showed himself deeply interested. His own manipulative powers were of the smallest, but he was an excellent critic.

'I think I may say of you what I said of your brother just now—that you might make a fortune, if you were to cultivate art seriously.'

'I wish I could make a fortune large enough to buy back Arden Court,' Clarissa answered eagerly.

'You think so much of Arden?'

'O yes, I am always thinking of it, always dreaming of it; the dear old rooms haunt me sleeping and waking. I suppose they are all altered now. I think it would almost break my heart to see them different.'

'Do you know, I am scarcely in a position to understand that fervent love for one's birthplace. I may be said to have no birthplace myself. I was born in lodgings, or a furnished house—some tem-

porary ark of that kind—the next thing to being born on board ship, and having Stepney for one's parish. My father was in a hard-working cavalry regiment, and the early days of my mother's married life were spent in perpetual wanderings. They separated, when I was about eight years old, for ever—a sad story, of course—something worse than incompatibility of temper on the husband's side; and from that time I never saw him, though he lived for some years. So, you see, the words "home" and "father" are for me very little more than sentimental abstractions. But with my mother I have been quite happy. She has indeed been the most devoted of women. She took a house at Eton when my brother and I were at school there, and superintended our home studies herself; and from that time to this she has watched my career with unchanging care. It is the old story of maternal kindness and filial shortcomings. I have given her a world of trouble; but I am not the less fond of her, or the less grateful to her.' He stopped for a few moments, with something like a sigh, and then went on in a lighter tone: 'You can see, however, that, having no ancestral home of my own, I am hardly able to understand the depth of your feeling for

Arden Court. There is an old place down in Kent, a fine old castellated mansion, built in the days of Edward VI., which is to be mine by and by; but I doubt if I shall ever value it as you do your old home. Perhaps I am wanting in the poetic feeling necessary for the appreciation of these things.'

'O no, it is not that,' Clarissa answered eagerly; 'but the house you speak of will not have been your home. You won't have that dim, dreamy recollection of childhood spent in the old rooms; another life, the life of another being almost, it seems, as one looks back to it. I have only the faintest memory of my mother; but it is very sweet, and it is all associated with Arden Court. I cannot conjure up her image for a moment without that background. Yes, I do wish for fortune, for that one reason. I would give the world to win back Arden.'

She was very much in earnest. Her cheeks flushed and her eyes brightened with those eager words. Never perhaps had she looked lovelier than at that moment. George Fairfax paused a little before he answered her, admiring the bright animated face; admiring her, he thought, very much as he might have admired some beautiful wayward child. And then he said gravely:

'It is dangerous to wish for anything so intensely. There are wishes the gratification whereof is fatal. There are a dozen old stories in the classics to show that; to say nothing of all those mediæval legends in which Satan is complaisant to some eager wisher.'

'But there is no chance of my wish being gratified. If I could work my fingers to the bone in the pursuit of art or literature, or any of the professions by which women win money, I should never earn the price of Arden; nor would that hateful Mr. Granger be disposed to sell a place which gives him his position in the county. And I suppose he is fond of it, after a fashion. He has spent a fortune upon improvements. Improvements!' repeated Clarissa contemptuously; 'I daresay he has improved away the very spirit of the place.'

'You cherish a strong dislike for this gentleman, it seems, Miss Lovel.'

'I am wicked enough to dislike him for having robbed us of Arden. Of course you will say, that any one else might have bought the place. But then I can only reply, that I should have disliked any other purchaser just the same; a little less though, perhaps, if he had been a member of some noble old

family—a man with a great name. It would have been some consolation to think that Arden was promoted.'

'I am afraid there is a leaven of good old Tory spirit in your composition, Miss Lovel.'

'I suppose papa is a Tory. I know he has a profound contempt for what he calls new people—very foolish, of course, I quite feel that; but I think he cannot help remembering that he comes of a good old race which has fallen upon evil days.'

'You remember my telling you that I had been to Arden Court. Mr. Granger gave a state dinner once while I was staying here, and I went with Fred and Lady Laura. I found him not by any means a disagreeable person. He is just a little slow and ponderous, and I should scarcely give him credit for a profound or brilliant intellect; but he is certainly sensible, well-informed, and he gave me the idea of being the very essence of truth.'

'I daresay he is very nice,' Clarissa answered with a subdued sigh. 'He has always been kind and attentive to papa, sending game and hothouse fruit, and that kind of thing; and he has begged that we would use the park as if it were our own; but I have never crossed the boundary that divides

my new home from my old one. I couldn't bear to see the old walks now.'

They talked for a good deal longer, till the clanging of the Castle bell warned Clarissa that it was time to dress for dinner. It is amazing how rapidly time will pass in such serious confidential talk. George Fairfax looked at his watch with an air of disbelief in that supreme authority the Castle bell, which was renowned for its exact observance of Greenwich time. That blusterous rainy August afternoon had slipped away so quickly.

'It is a repetition of my experience during that night journey to Holborough,' Mr. Fairfax said, smiling. 'You have a knack of charming away the hours, Miss Lovel.'

It was the commonest, most conventional form of compliment, no doubt; but Clarissa blushed a little, and bent rather lower over the portfolio, which she was closing, than she had done before. Then she put the portfolio under her arm, murmured something about going to dress, made George Fairfax a gracious curtsey, and left him.

He did not hurry away to make his own toilet, but walked up and down the library for some minutes, thinking.

'What a sweet girl she is!' he said to himself, 'and what a pity her position is not a better one! With a father like that, and a brother who has stamped himself as a scapegrace at the beginning of life, what is to become of her? Unless she marries well, I see no hopeful prospect for her future. But of course such a girl as that is sure to make a good marriage.'

Instead of being cheered by this view of the case, Mr. Fairfax's brow grew darker, and his step heavier.

'What does it matter to me whom she chooses for her husband?' he asked himself; 'and yet no man would like to see such a girl throw herself away for mercenary reasons. If I had known her a few months ago! If! What is the history of human error but a succession of "ifs"? Would it have been better for me or for her, that we had learned to know each other while I was free? The happiest thing for *me* would have been never to have met her at all. I felt myself in some kind of danger that night we met in the railway-carriage. Her race is fatal to mine, I begin to think. Any connection in that quarter would have galled my mother to the quick—broken her heart perhaps; and I am bound

to consider her in all I do. Nor am I a schoolboy, to fancy that the whole colour of my life is to be governed by such an influence as this. She is only a pretty woman, with a low sweet voice, and gentle winning ways. Most people would call Geraldine the handsomer of the two. Poor child! She ought to seem no more than a child to me. I think she likes me, and trusts me. I wish Geraldine were kinder to her; I wish—'

He did not particularise that last wish even to himself, but went away to dress, having wasted the first quarter of the three-quarters that elapsed between the first and second bell at Hale Castle.

Throughout that evening, which was an unusually quiet and domestic evening for Hale, he did not talk any more to Clarissa. It might even have been thought that he scrupulously, and of a fixed purpose, avoided her. He devoted himself to chess with Lady Geraldine; a game he played indifferently, and for which he cherished a profound aversion. But chess was one of Geraldine Challoner's strong points; and that aristocratic beauty never looked more regal than when she sat before a chess-table, with one thin white hand hovering gently above the carved ivory pieces.

Mr. Fairfax lost four or five games in succession, excusing his own careless play every time by some dextrous compliment to his betrothed. More than once he stifled a yawn—more than once his glances wandered away to the group near the piano, amidst which Clarissa was seated, listening to Lizzie Fermor's brilliant waltzes and mazurkas, with an open music-book on her lap, turning over the leaves now and then, with rather a listless preoccupied air, Mr. Fairfax thought.

That evening did certainly seem very dreary to Clarissa, in spite of Miss Fermor's dashing music and animated chatter. She missed that other talk, half playful, half earnest, with which George Fairfax had been wont to beguile some part of every evening; finding her out, as if by a subtle instinct, in whatever corner of the room she happened to be, and always devoting one stray half-hour of the evening to her society. To-night all things came to an end: matrons and misses murmured their good-nights and sailed away to the corridor, where there was a regiment of small silver candlesticks, emblazoned with the numerous quarterings of Armstrong and Challoner; and George Fairfax only rose from the chess-table as Lady Laura's guests abandoned

the drawing-room. Geraldine bade her lover good-night with her most bewitching smile—a smile in which there was even some faint ray of warmth.

'You have given me some very easy victories,' she said, as they shook hands, 'and I won't flatter you by saying you have played well. But it was very good of you to sit so long at a game which I know you detest, only to please me.'

'A very small sacrifice, surely, my dear Geraldine. We'll play chess every night, if you like. I don't care much for the game in the abstract, I admit; but I am never tired of admiring your judicious play, or the exquisite shape of your hands.'

'No, no; I don't want to try you with such severe training. I saw how tired you were more than once to-night, and how your eyes wandered away to those noisy girls by the piano, like an idle boy who is kept at his lessons when his companions are at play.'

Mr. Fairfax's sunburnt countenance reddened a little at this reproof.

'Was I inattentive?' he asked; 'I did not know that. I was quite aware of my bad play, and I really believe I was conscientious.'

And so they wished each other good-night and

parted. Geraldine Challoner did not go at once to her own room. She had to pass her sister's quarters on her way, and stopped at the door of the dressing-room.

'Are you quite alone, Laura?' she asked, looking in.

'Quite alone.'

A maid was busy unweaving a splendid pyramid of chestnut plaits which had crowned the head of her mistress; but she of course counted for nothing, and could be dismissed at any moment.

'And there will not be half-a-dozen people coming in to gossip?' Lady Geraldine asked in rather a fretful tone, as she flung herself into an arm-chair near the dressing-table.

'Not a soul; I have wished every one good-night. I was rather tired, to tell the truth, and not inclined for talk. But of course I am always glad of a chat with you, Geraldine.—You may go, Parker; I can finish my hair myself.'

The maid retired, as quietly as some attendant spirit.

Lady Laura took up a big ivory brush and began smoothing the long chestnut locks in a meditative way, waiting for her sister to speak. But Lady

Geraldine seemed scarcely in the mood for lively conversation; her fingers were twisting themselves in and out upon the arm of her chair in a nervous way, and her face had a thoughtful, not to say moody, expression.

Her sister watched her for some minutes silently.

'What is the matter, Geraldine?' she inquired at last. 'I can see there is something wrong.'

'There is very much that is wrong,' the other answered with a kind of suppressed vehemence. 'Upon my word, Laura, I believe it is your destiny to stand in my light at every stage of my life, or you would scarcely have happened to have planted that girl here just at this particular time.'

'What girl?' cried Lady Laura, amazed at this sudden accusation.

'Clarissa Lovel.'

'Good gracious me, Geraldine! what has my poor Clarissa done to offend you?'

'Your poor Clarissa has only set her cap at George Fairfax; and as she happens to be several years younger than I am, and I suppose a good deal prettier, she has thoroughly succeeded in distracting his attention—his regard, perhaps—from myself.'

Laura Armstrong dropped the hair-brush, in profound consternation.

'My dear Geraldine, this is the merest jealous folly on your part. Clarissa is the very last girl in the world who would be guilty of such meanness as to try and attract another woman's lover. Besides, I am sure that George's attachment to yourself—'

'Pray, don't preach about that, Laura!' her sister broke in impatiently. 'I must be the best judge of his attachment; and you must be the very blindest of women, if you have not seen how your newest pet and protégée has contrived to lure George to her side night after night, and to interest him by her pretty looks and juvenile airs and graces.'

'Why, I don't believe George spoke to Miss Lovel once this evening; he was playing chess with you from the moment he came to the drawing-room after dinner.'

'To-night was an exceptional case. Mr. Fairfax was evidently on duty. His manner all the evening was that of a man who has been consciously culpable, and is trying to atone for bad behaviour. And your favourite was wounded by his desertion — I could see that.'

'She did seem a little depressed, certainly,' Lady

Laura answered thoughtfully; 'I observed that myself. But I know that the girl has a noble nature, and if she has been so foolish as to be just a little attracted by George Fairfax, she will very quickly awake to a sense of her folly. Pray, don't give yourself the faintest uneasiness, Geraldine. I have my plans for Clarissa Lovel, and this hint of yours will make me more anxious to put them into execution. As for George, it is natural to men to flirt; there's no use in being angry with them. I'm sure that wretched Fred of mine has flirted desperately, in his way.'

Lady Geraldine gave her shoulders a contemptuous shrug, expressive of a most profound indifference to the delinquencies of Mr. Armstrong.

'Your husband and George Fairfax are two very different people,' she said.

'But you don't for a moment suppose there is anything serious in this business?' Laura asked anxiously.

'How can I tell? I sometimes think that George has never really cared for me; that he proposed to me because he thought his mother would like the marriage, and because our names had often been linked together, and our marriage was in a

manner expected by people, and so on. Yes, Laura, I have sometimes doubted if he ever loved me—I hate to talk of these things, even to you; but there are times when one must confide in some one—and I have been sorely tempted to break off the engagement.'

She rose from her chair, and began to pace up and down the room in a quick impatient way.

'Upon my honour, I believe it would be the happiest thing for both of us,' she said.

Lady Laura looked at her sister with perfect consternation.

'My dearest Geraldine, you would surely never be so mad!' she exclaimed. 'You could not be so foolish as to sacrifice the happiness of your future life to a caprice of the moment—a mere outbreak of temper. Pray, let there be an end of such nonsense. I am sure George is sincerely attached to you, and I am very much mistaken in you if you do not like him—love him—better than you can ever hope to love any other man in this world.'

'O yes; I like him well enough,' said Geraldine Challoner impatiently; 'too well to endure anything less than perfect sincerity on his part.'

'But, my dearest, I am sure that he is sincere,'

Laura answered soothingly. 'Now, my own Geraldine, do pray be reasonable, and leave this business to me. As for Clarissa, I have plans for her, the realisation of which would set your mind quite at ease; but if I cannot put them into execution immediately, the girl shall go. Of course you are the first consideration. With regard to George, if you would only let me sound him, I am sure I should get at the real state of his feelings, and find them all we can wish—'

'Laura!' cried Geraldine indignantly, 'if you dare to interfere, in the smallest degree, with this business, I shall never speak to you again.'

'My dear Geraldine!'

'Remember that, Laura, and remember that I mean what I say. I will not permit so much as the faintest hint of anything I have told you.'

'My dearest girl, I pledge myself not to speak one word,' protested Lady Laura, very much alarmed by her sister's indignation.

Geraldine left her soon after this, vexed with herself for having betrayed so much feeling, even to a sister; left her—not to repose in peaceful slumbers, but to walk up and down her room till early morning, and look out at daybreak on the Castle

gardens and the purple woods beyond, with a haggard face and blank unseeing eyes.

George Fairfax meanwhile had lain himself down to take his rest in tolerable good-humour with himself and the world in general.

'I really think I behaved very well,' he said to himself; 'and having made up my mind to stop anything like a flirtation with that perilously fascinating Clarissa, I shall stick to my resolve with the heroism of an ancient Roman; though the Romans were hardly so heroic in that matter, by the way—witness the havoc made by that fatal Egyptian, a little bit of a woman that could be bundled up in a carpet—to say nothing of the general predilection for somebody else's wife which prevailed in those days, and which makes Suetonius read like a modern French novel. I did not think there was so much of the old leaven left in me. My sweet Clarissa! I fancy she likes me—in a sisterly kind of way, of course—and trusts me not a little. And yet I must seem cold to her, and hold myself aloof, and wound the tender untried heart a little perhaps. Hard upon both of us, but I suppose only a common element in the initiatory ordinances of matrimony.'

And so George Fairfax closed his eyes and fell

asleep, with the image of Clarissa before him in that final moment of consciousness, whereby the same image haunted him in his slumbers that night, alternately perplexing or delighting him; while ever and anon the face of his betrothed, pale and statue-like, came between him and that other face; or the perfect hand he had admired at chess that night was stretched out through the darkness to push aside the form of Clarissa Lovel.

That erring dreamer was a man accustomed to take all things lightly; not a man of high principle — a man whose best original impulses had been weakened and deadened not a little by the fellowship he had kept, and the life he had led; a man unhappily destined to exercise an influence over others disproportionate to the weight of his own character.

Lady Laura was much disturbed by her sister's confidence; and being of a temperament to which the solitary endurance of any mental burden is almost impossible, immediately set to work to do the very things which would have been most obnoxious to Geraldine Challoner. In the first place she awakened her husband from comfortable slumbers, haunted by no more awful forms than his last acquisition

in horse-flesh, or the oxen he was fattening for the next cattle-show; and determinedly kept him awake while she gave him a detailed account of the distressing scene she had just had with 'poor Geraldine.'

Mr. Armstrong, whose yawns and vague disjointed replies were piteous to hear, thought there was only one person in question who merited the epithet 'poor,' and that person himself; but he made some faint show of being interested, nevertheless.

'Silly woman, silly woman!' he mumbled at last. 'I've always thought she rides the high horse rather too much with Fairfax. Men don't like that sort of thing, you know. Geraldine's a very fine woman, but she can't twist a man round her fingers as you can, Laura. Why don't you speak to George Fairfax, and hurry on the marriage somehow? The sooner the business is settled the better, with such a restive couple as these two; uncommonly hard to drive in double harness—the mare inclined to jib, and the other with a tendency to shy. You're such a manager, Laura, you'd make matters square in no time.'

If Lady Laura prided herself on one of her attributes more than another—and she did cherish a harm-

less vanity about many things—it was in the idea that she was a kind of social Talleyrand. So on this particular occasion, encouraged by simple Fred Armstrong, who had a rooted belief that there never had existed upon this earth such a wonderful woman as his wife, my lady resolved to take the affairs of her sister under her protection, and to bring all things to a triumphant issue. She felt very little compunction about breaking her promise to Geraldine.

'All depends upon the manner in which a thing is done,' she said to herself complacently, as she composed herself for slumber; 'of course I shall act with the most extreme delicacy. But it would never do for my sister's chances in life to be ruined for want of a little judicious intervention.'

CHAPTER IX.

LADY LAURA DIPLOMATISES.

THE weather was fine next day, and the Castle party drove ten miles to a rustic race-course, where there was a meeting of a very insignificant character, but interesting to Mr. Armstrong, to whom a horse was a source of perennial delight, and a fair excuse for a long gay drive, and a picnic luncheon in carriages and on coach-boxes.

Amongst Lady Laura's accomplishments was the polite art of driving. To-day she elected to drive a high phaeton with a pair of roans, and invited George Fairfax to take the seat beside her. Lady Geraldine had a headache, and had not appeared that morning; but had sent a message to her sister, to request that her indisposition, which was the merest trifle, might not prevent Mr. Fairfax going to the races.

Mr. Fairfax at first seemed much inclined to remain at home, and perform garrison duty.

'Geraldine will come downstairs presently, I daresay,' he said to Lady Laura, 'and we can have a quiet stroll in the gardens, while you are all away. I don't care a straw about the Mickleham races. Please leave me at home, Lady Laura.'

'But Geraldine begs that you will go. She'll keep her room all day, I've no doubt; she generally does, when she has one of her headaches. Every one is going, and I have set my heart on driving you. I want to hear what you think of the roans. Come, George, I really must insist upon it.'

She led him off to the phaeton triumphantly; while Frederick Armstrong was fain to find some vent for his admiration of his gifted wife's diplomacy in sundry winks and grins to the address of no one in particular, as he bustled to and fro between the terrace and the hall, arranging the mode and manner of the day's excursion—who was to be driven by whom, and so on.

Clarissa found herself bestowed in a landau full of ladies, Barbara Fermor amongst them; and was very merry with these agreeable companions, who gave her no time to meditate upon that change in

Mr. Fairfax's manner last night, which had troubled her a little in spite of her better sense. He was nothing to her of course; an accidental acquaintance whom she might never see again after this visit; but he had known her brother, and he had been kind and sympathetic—so much so, that she would have been glad to think that he was really her friend. Perhaps, after all, there was very little cause that she should be perplexed or worried on account of his quiet avoidance of her that one evening; but then Clarissa Lovel was young and inexperienced, and thus apt to be hypersensitive, and easily disturbed about trifles.

Having secured a comfortable *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Fairfax, Lady Laura lost no time in improving the occasion. They were scarcely a mile from the Castle before she began to touch upon the subject of the intended marriage, lightly, and with an airy gaiety of manner which covered her real earnestness.

'When is it to be, George?' she asked. 'I really want to know something positive, on account of my own engagements and Fred's, which must all hinge more or less on this important business. There's no use in my talking to Geraldine, for she is really

the most impracticable of beings, and I can never get her to say anything definite.'

'My dear Lady Laura, I am almost in the same position. I have more than once tried to induce her to fix the date for her marriage, but she has always put the subject aside somehow or other. I really don't like to bore her, you see; and no doubt things will arrange themselves in due course.'

Lady Laura gave a little sigh of relief. He did not avoid the question—that was something; nor did her interference seem in any manner unpleasant to him. Indeed, nothing could be more perfect than his air of careless good-humour, Lady Laura thought.

But she did not mean the subject to drop here; and after a little graceful manipulation of the reins, a glance backward to see how far behind they had left the rest of the caravan, and some slight slackening of the pace at which they had been going, she went on.

'No doubt things would arrange themselves easily enough, if nothing happened to interfere with our plans. But the fact is, my dear George, I am really most uneasy about the state of poor papa's health. He has been so sadly feeble for the last

three or four years, and I feel that we may lose him at any moment. At his age, poor dear soul, it is a calamity for which we must be prepared. But of course such an event would postpone your marriage for a long time, and I should really like to see my sister happily settled before the blow fell upon her. She has been so much with him, you see, and is so deeply attached to him—it will be worse for her than for any of us.'

'I—I conclude so,' Mr. Fairfax replied rather doubtfully. He could not help wondering a little how his betrothed cared to leave a beloved father in so critical a condition; but he knew that his future sister-in-law was somewhat given to exaggeration, a high colouring of simple facts, as well as to the friendly direction of other people's affairs. He was therefore not surprised, upon reflection, that she should magnify her father's danger and her sister's filial devotion. Nor was he surprised that she should be anxious to hasten his marriage. It was natural to this impulsive matron to be eager for something, some event involving fine dress and invitations, elaborate dinners, and the gathering together of a frivolous crowd to be astonished and delighted by her own cleverness and fascination. To have a hand-

some sister to marry, and to marry well, was of course a great opportunity for the display of all those powers in which Lady Laura took especial pride.

And then George Fairfax had told himself that this marriage was the best possible thing for him; and being so, it would be well that there should be no unnecessary delay. He had perhaps a vague feeling that he was giving up a good deal in sacrificing his liberty; but on the whole the sacrifice was a wise one, and could not be consummated too quickly.

'I trust you alarm yourself needlessly about your father, my dear Lady Laura,' he said presently; 'but upon my word you cannot be more anxious to see this affair settled than I am. I want to spend my honeymoon at Lyvedon, the quietest, most picturesque old place you can imagine, but not very enjoyable when the leaves are falling. My good uncle has set his heart on my borrowing his house for this purpose, and I think it would please Geraldine to become acquainted with an estate which must be her own in a few years.'

'Unquestionably,' cried Lady Laura eagerly; 'but you know what Geraldine is, or you ought to know—so foolishly proud and sensitive. She has known you so long, and perhaps—she would never forgive

me if she knew I had hinted such a thing—had half-unconsciously given you her heart before she had reason to be assured of your regard; and this would make her peculiarly sensitive. Now do, dear George, press the question, and let everything be settled as soon as possible, or I have an apprehension that somehow or other my sister will slip through your fingers.'

Mr. Fairfax looked wonderingly at his charioteer.

'Has she said anything to put this fancy into your head?' he asked, with gravity rather than alarm.

'Said anything! O dear, no. Geraldine is the last person to talk about her own feelings. But I know her so well,' concluded Lady Laura with a solemn air.

After this there came a brief silence. George Fairfax was a little puzzled by my lady's diplomacy, and perhaps just a little disgusted. Again and again he told himself that this union with Geraldine Challoner was the very best thing that could happen to him; it would bring him to anchor, at any rate, and he had been such mere driftwood until now. But he wanted to feel himself quite a free agent, and this pressing-on of the marriage by Lady Laura was in

some manner discordant with his sense of the fitness of things. It looked a little like manœuvring; yet after all she was quite sincere, perhaps, and did really apprehend her father's death intervening to postpone the wedding.

He would not remain long silent, lest she should fancy him displeased, and proceeded presently to pay her some compliments upon the roans, and on her driving; after which they rattled on pleasantly enough till they came to the green slope of a hill, where there was a rude rustic stand, and a railed race-course with a sprinkling of carriages on one side and gipsy-tents on the other.

Here Mr. Fairfax delivered over Lady Laura to her natural protector; and being free to stroll about at his own pleasure, contrived to spend a very agreeable day, devoting the greater part thereof to attendance upon the landau full of ladies, amongst whom was Clarissa Lovel. And she, being relieved from that harassing notion that she had in some unknown manner offended him, and being so new to all the pleasures of life that even these rustic races were delightful to her, was at her brightest, full of gay girlish talk and merry laughter. He was not to see her thus many times again, in all the freshness

of her young beauty, perfectly natural and unrestrained.

Once in the course of that day he left his post by the landau, and went for a solitary ramble; not amongst the tents, where black-eyed Bohemians saluted him as 'my pretty gentleman,' or the knock-'em-downs and weighing-machines, or the bucolic babble of the ring, but away across the grassy slope, turning his back upon the race-course. He wanted to think it out again, in his own phrase, just as he had thought it out the day before in the library at Hale.

'I am afraid I am getting too fond of her,' he said to himself. 'It's the old story: just like dram-drinking. I take the pledge, and then go and drink again. I am the weakest of mankind. But it cannot make very much difference. She knows I am engaged—and—Lady Laura is right. The sooner the marriage comes off, the better. I shall never be safe till the knot is tied; and then duty, honour, feeling, and a dozen other motives, will hold me to the right course.'

He strolled back to his party only a little time before the horses were put in, and on this occasion went straight to the phaeton, and devoted himself to Lady Laura.

'You are going to drive me home, of course?' he said. 'I mean to claim my place.'

'I hardly think you have any right to it, after your desertion of me. You have been flirting with those girls in the landau all day.'

'Flirting is one of the melancholy privileges of my condition. An engaged man enjoys an immunity in that matter. When a criminal is condemned to death, they give him whatever he likes to eat, you know. It is almost the same kind of thing.'

He took his place in the phaeton presently, and talked gaily enough all the way home, in that particular strain required to match my lady's agreeable rattle; but he had a vague sense of uneasiness lurking somewhere in his mind, a half consciousness that he was drifting the wrong way.

All that evening he was especially attentive to Lady Geraldine, whose headache had left her with a pale and pensive look which was not without its charm. The stately beauty had a softer air, the brightness of the blue eyes was not so cold as it was wont to be. They played chess again, and Mr. Fairfax kept aloof from Clarissa. They walked together in the gardens for a couple of hours next morning; and George Fairfax pressed the question of his mar-

riage with such a show of earnestness and warmth, that Geraldine's rebellious pride was at once solaced and subdued, and she consented to agree to any arrangement he and Lady Laura might make.

'My sister is so much more practical than I am,' she said, 'and I would really rather leave everything to her and to you.'

Lightly as she tried to speak of the future, she did on this occasion allow her lover to perceive that he was indeed very dear to her, and that the coldness which had sometimes wounded him was little more than a veil beneath which a proud woman strove to hide her deepest feelings. Mr. Fairfax rather liked this quality of pride in his future wife, even if it were carried so far as to be almost a blemish. It would be the surest safeguard of his home in the time to come. Such women are not prone to petty faults, or given to small quarrels. A man has a kind of security from trivial annoyances in an alliance with such a one.

It was all settled, therefore, in that two hours' stroll in the sunny garden, where the roses still bloomed, in some diminution of their midsummer glory, their sweetness just a little overpowered by the spicy odour of innumerable carnations, their deli-

cate colours eclipsed here and there by an impertinent early dahlia. Everything was settled. The very date of the wedding was to be decided at once by Lady Laura and the bridegroom; and when George Fairfax went back to the Castle, he felt, perhaps for the first time in his life, that he really was an engaged man. It was rather a solemn feeling, but not altogether an unpleasant one. He had seen more of Geraldine Challoner's heart this morning than he had ever seen before. It pleased him to discover that she really loved him; that the marriage was to be something more to her than a merely advantageous alliance; that she would in all probability have accepted him had he offered himself to her in his brother's lifetime. Since his thirtieth birthday he had begun to feel himself something of a waif and stray. There had been mistakes in his life, errors he would be very glad to forget in an utterly new existence. It was pleasant to know himself beloved by a proud and virtuous woman, a woman whose love was neither to be easily won nor lightly lost.

He went back to the Castle more at ease with himself than he had felt for some time. His future was settled, and he had done his duty.

CHAPTER X.

LADY LAURA'S PREPARATIONS.

AFTER that interview between Mr. Fairfax and his betrothed, there was no time wasted. Laura Armstrong was enraptured at being made arbiter of the arrangements, and was all haste and eagerness, impetuosity and animation. The wedding was appointed for the second week in September, about five weeks from the period of that garden *tête-à-tête*. Lady Geraldine was to go to town for a week, attended only by her maid, to see her father, and to give the necessary orders for her trousseau. The business of settlements would be arranged between the family lawyers. There were no difficulties. Lord Calderwood was not able to settle anything on his daughter, and Mr. Fairfax was inclined to be very generous. There was no prospect of squabbling or unpleasantness.

George Fairfax was to be away during this brief absence of his betrothed. He had an engagement with an old friend and brother officer who was wont to spend the autumn in a roughly comfortable shooting-box in the north of Scotland, and whom he had promised to visit before his marriage; as a kind of farewell to bachelorhood and bachelor friendship. There could be no other opportunity for the fulfilment of this promise, and it was better that Mr. Fairfax should be away while Lady Geraldine was in London. As the period of his marriage became imminent, he had a vague feeling that he was an object of general attention; that every feminine eye, at any rate, was on him; and that the watch would be all the closer in the absence of his betrothed. No, he did not want to dawdle away a week (off duty) at Hale Castle. Never before had he so yearned for the rough freedom of Major Beaman's shooting-quarters, the noisy mirth of those rude Homeric feasts, half dinner, half supper, so welcome after a long day's sport, with a quiet rubber, perhaps, to finish with, and a brew of punch after a recondite recipe of the Major's, which he was facetiously declared to bear tattooed above the region of his heart. Mr. Fairfax had been two months at Hale when Lady

Geraldine left on that dutiful visit to her father, and necessary interviewing of milliners and dressmakers; and he was, it is just possible, a little tired of decorous country-house life, with its weekly dinner-parties and perpetual influx of county families to luncheon, and its unfailing croquet. He felt, too, that at such a time it would be perhaps safer for him to be away from Clarissa Lovel.

Was there any real danger for him in her presence? If he asked himself this question nowadays, he was able to answer boldly in the negative. There might have been a time of peril, just one perilous interval when he was in some danger of stumbling; but he had pulled himself up in time, with an admirable discretion, he thought, and now felt as bold as a lion. After that morning with Lady Geraldine in the garden, he had never wavered. He had not been less kind or polite to Miss Lovel; he had only made a point of avoiding anything like that dangerous confidential friendship which had been so nearly arising between them.

Of course every guest at the Castle knew all about the intended wedding directly things had been finally arranged. Lady Laura was not given to the keeping of secrets, and this important fact she

communicated to all her particular friends with a radiant face and a most triumphant manner. The two Fermor girls and Clarissa she invited to remain at Hale till after the wedding, and to act as bridesmaids.

'My sisters Emily and Louisa will make two more,' she said; 'and that pretty little Miss Trellis, Admiral Trellis's daughter, will be the sixth—I shall have only six. We'll have a grand discussion about the dresses to-morrow morning. I should like to strike-out something original, if it were possible. We shall see what Madame Albertine proposes. I have written to ask her for her ideas; but a milliner's ideas are so *bornées*.'

Lady Laura had obtained permission from her sister to enlist Clarissa in the ranks of the bridesmaids.

'It would look so strange to exclude a pretty girl like that,' she said. Whereupon Geraldine had replied rather coldly that she did not wish to do anything that was strange, and that Miss Lovel was at liberty to be one of her bridesmaids. She had studiously ignored the confession of jealousy made that night in her sister's dressing-room; nor had Laura ever presumed to make the faintest allu-

sion to it. Things had gone so well since, and there seemed nothing easier than to forget that unwonted outbreak of womanly passion.

Clarissa heard the approaching marriage discussed with a strange feeling, a nameless undefinable regret. It seemed to her that George Fairfax was the only person in her small world who really understood her, the only man who could have been her friend and counsellor. It was a foolish fancy, no doubt, and had very little foundation in fact; but, argue with herself as she might against her folly, she could not help feeling that this marriage was in somewise a calamity for her. She was quite sure that Lady Geraldine did not like her, and that, as Lady Geraldine's husband, George Fairfax could not be her friend. She thought of this a great deal in those busy weeks before the wedding, and wondered at the heaviness of her heart in these days. What was it that she had lost? As she had wondered a little while ago at the brightness of her life, she wondered now at its darkness. It seemed as if all the colour had gone out of her existence all at once; as if she had been wandering for a little while in some enchanted region, and found herself now suddenly thrust forth

from the gates of that fairy paradise upon the bleak outer world. The memory of her troubles came back to her with a sudden sharpness. She had almost forgotten them of late—her brother's exile and disgrace, her father's coldness, all that made her fate dreary and hopeless. She looked forward to the future with a shudder. What had she to hope for—now?

It was the last week in August when Lady Geraldine went up to London, and George Fairfax hurried northward to his friend's aerie. The trousseau had been put in hand a day or two after the final settlement of affairs, and the post had carried voluminous letters of instruction from Lady Laura to the milliners, and had brought back little parcels containing snippings of dainty fabrics, scraps of laces, and morsels of delicate silk, in order that colours and materials might be selected by the bride. Everything was in progress, and Lady Geraldine was only wanted for the adjustment of those more important details which required personal supervision.

If Clarissa Lovel could have escaped from all this pleasant bustle and confusion, from the perpetual consultations and discussions which Lady

Laura held with all her favourites upon the subject of the coming marriage—if she could by any means have avoided all these, and above all her honourable office of bridesmaid—she would most gladly have done so. A sudden yearning for the perfect peace, the calm eventless days of her old life at Mill Cottage, had taken possession of her. In a moment, as if by some magical change, the glory and delight of that brilliant existence at the Castle seemed to have vanished away. There were the same pleasures, the same people; but the very atmosphere was different, and she began to feel like those other girls whose dulness of soul she had wondered at a little while ago.

'I suppose I enjoyed myself too much when first I came here,' she thought, perplexed by this change in herself. 'I gave myself up too entirely to the novelty of this gay life, and have used-up my capacity for enjoyment, almost like those girls who have gone through half-a-dozen London seasons.'

When Lady Geraldine and George Fairfax were gone, it seemed to Clarissa that the Castle had a vacant air without them. The play still went on, but the chief actors had vanished from the scene.

Miss Lovel had allowed herself to feel an almost morbid interest in Mr. Fairfax's betrothed. She had watched Lady Geraldine from day to day, half unconsciously, almost in spite of herself, wondering whether she really loved her future husband, or whether this alliance were only the dreary simulacrum she had read of in fashionable novels—a marriage of convenience. Lady Laura had certainly declared that her sister was much attached to Mr. Fairfax; but then, in an artificial world, where such a mode of marrying and giving in marriage obtained, it would obviously be the business of the bride's relatives to affect a warm belief in her affection for the chosen victim. In all her watching Clarissa had never surprised one outward sign of Geraldine Challoner's love. It was very difficult for a warm-hearted impulsive girl to believe in the possibility of any depth of feeling beneath that coldly placid manner. Nor did she perceive in Mr. Fairfax himself many of those evidences of affection which she would have expected from a man in his position. It was quite true that as the time of his marriage drew near he devoted himself more and more exclusively to his betrothed; but Clarissa could not help fancying, among her

many fancies about these two people, that there was something formal and ceremonial in his devotion; that he had, at the best, something of the air of a man who was doing his duty. Yet it would have seemed absurd to doubt the reality of his attachment to Lady Geraldine, or to fear the result of an engagement that had grown out of a friendship which had lasted for years. The chorus of friends at Hale Castle were never tired of dwelling upon this fact, and declaring what a beautiful and perfect arrangement such a marriage was. It was only Lizzie Fermor who, in moments of confidential converse with Clarissa, was apt to elevate her expressive eyebrows and impertinent little nose, and to make disrespectful comments upon the subject of Lady Geraldine's engagement—remarks which Miss Lovel felt it in some manner her duty to parry, by a warm defence of her friend's sister.

'You are such a partisan, Clarissa,' Miss Fermor would exclaim impatiently; 'but take my word for it, that woman only marries George Fairfax because she feels she has come to the end of her chances, and that this is about the last opportunity she may have of making a decent marriage.'

The engaged couple were to be absent only a

week — that was a settled point; for on the very day after that arranged for their return there was to be a ball at Hale Castle—the first real ball of the season—an event which would of course lose half its glory if Lady Geraldine and her lover were missing. So Laura Armstrong had been most emphatic in her parting charge to George Fairfax.

'Remember, George,' however fascinating your bachelor friends may be — and of course we know that nothing *we* have to offer you in a civilised way can be so delightful as roughing it in a Highland bothy (bothy is what you call your cottage, isn't it?) with a tribe of wild sportsmen—you are to be back in time for my ball on the twenty-fifth. I shall never forgive you, if you fail me.'

'My dear Lady Laura, I would perish in the struggle to be up to time, rather than be such a caitiff. I would do the journey on foot, like Jeannie Deans, rather than incur the odium of disappointing so fair a hostess.'

And upon this Mr. Fairfax departed, with a gayer aspect than he had worn of late, almost as if it had been a relief to him to get away from Hale Castle.

Lady Laura had a new set of visitors coming,

and was full of the business involved in their reception. She was not a person who left every arrangement to servants, numerous and skilful as her staff was. She liked to have a finger in every pie, and it was one of her boasts that no department of the household was without her supervision. She would stop in the middle of a page of Tasso to discuss the day's bill of fare with her cook; and that functionary had enough to do to gratify my lady's eagerness for originality and distinction even in the details of her dinner-table.

'My good Volavent,' she would say, tossing the poor man's list aside, with a despairing shrug of her shoulders, 'all these *entrées* are as old as the hills. I am sure Adam must have had stewed pigeons with green peas, and chicken à la Marengo —they are the very ABC of cookery. Do, pray, strike out something a little newer. Let me see; I copied the *menu* of a dinner at St. Petersburg from "Count Cralonzki's diary of his own times," the other day, on purpose to show you. There really are some ideas in it. Do look it over, Volavent, and see if it will inspire you. We must try to rise above the level of a West-end hotel.'

In the same manner did my lady supervise the

gardens, to the affliction of the chief official and his dozen or so of underlings. To have the first peaches and the last grapes in the county of York, to decorate her table with the latest marvel in pitcher plants and rare butterfly-shaped orchids, was Lady Laura's ambition; to astonish morning visitors with new effects in the garden her unceasing desire. Nor within doors was her influence less actively exercised. Drawing-rooms and boudoirs, morning-rooms and bedchambers, were always undergoing some improving touch, some graceful embellishment, inspired by that changeful fancy. When new visitors were expected at the Castle, Lady Laura flitted about their rooms, inspecting every arrangement, and thinking of the smallest minutiæ. She would even look into the rooms prepared for the servants on these occasions, to be sure that nothing was wanting for their comfort. She liked the very maids and valets to go away and declare there was no place so pleasant as Hale Castle. Perhaps when people had been to her two or three times, she was apt to grow a little more careless upon these points. To dazzle and astonish was her chief delight, and of course it is somewhat difficult to dazzle old friends.

In the two days after Geraldine Challoner's departure Lady Laura was in her gayest mood. She had a delightful air of mystery in her converse with Clarissa; would stop suddenly sometimes in the midst of her discourse to kiss the girl, and would contemplate her for a few moments with her sweetest smile.

'My dear Lady Laura, what pleasant subject are you thinking about?' Clarissa asked wonderingly; 'I am sure there is something. You have such a mysterious air to-day, and one would suppose by your manner that I must be concerned in this mystery.'

'And suppose you were, Clary—suppose I were plotting for your happiness? But no; there is really nothing; you must not take such silly fancies into your head. You know how much I love you, Clary—as much as if you were a younger sister of my own; and there is nothing I would not do to secure your happiness.'

Clarissa shook her head sadly.

'My dear Lady Laura, good and generous as you are, it is not in your power to do that,' she said, 'unless you could make my father love me, or bring my brother happily home.'

'Or give you back Arden Court?' suggested Lady Laura, smiling.

'Ah, that is the wildest dream of all! But I would not even ask Providence for that. I would be content, if my father loved me; if we were only a happy united family.'

'Don't you think your father would be a changed man, if he could get back his old home somehow? The loss of that must have soured him a good deal.'

'I don't know about that. Yes, of course that loss does weigh upon his mind; but even when we were almost children he did not seem to care much for my brother Austin or me. He was not like other fathers.'

'His money troubles may have oppressed him even then. The loss of Arden Court might have been a foreseen calamity.'

'Yes, it may have been so. But there is no use in thinking of that. Even if papa were rich enough to buy it, Mr. Granger would never sell the Court.'

'Sell it!' repeated Lady Laura meditatively; 'well, perhaps not. One could hardly expect him to do that—a place for which he has done so much. But one never knows what may happen; I have really seen such wonderful changes come to pass among

friends and acquaintances of mine, that scarcely anything would astonish me—no, Clary, not if I were to see you mistress of Arden Court.'

And then Lady Laura kissed her protégée once more with effusion, and anon dipped her brush in the carmine, and went on with the manipulation of a florid initial in her missal—a fat gothic M, interlaced with ivy-leaves and holly.

'You haven't asked me who the people are that I am expecting this afternoon,' she said presently, with a careless air.

'My dear Lady Laura, if you were to tell me their names, I don't suppose I should be any wiser than I am now. I know so few people.'

'But you do know these—or at least you know all about them. My arrivals to-day are Mr. and Miss Granger.'

Clarissa gave a faint sigh, and bent a little lower over her work.

'Well, child, are you not surprised? have you nothing to say?' cried Lady Laura rather impatiently.

'I—I daresay they are very nice people,' Clarissa answered nervously. 'But the truth is—I know you must despise me for such folly—I cannot help asso-

ciating them with our loss, and I have a kind of involuntary dislike of them. I have never so much as seen them, you know—not even at church; for they go to the gothic chapel which Mr. Granger has built in his model village, and never come to our dear little church at Arden; and it is very childish and absurd of me, no doubt, but I don't think I ever could like them.'

'It *is* very absurd of you, Clary,' returned my lady; 'and if I could be angry with you for anything, it certainly would be for this unjust prejudice against people I want you to like. Think what a nice companion Miss Granger would be for you when you are at home—so near a neighbour, and really a very superior girl.'

'I don't want a companion; I am used to being alone.'

'Well, well, when you come to know her, you will like her very much, I daresay, in spite of yourself; that will be my triumph. I am bent upon bringing about friendly relations between your father and Mr. Granger.'

'You will never do that, Lady Laura.'

'I don't know. I have a profound faith in my own ideas.'

CHAPTER XI.

DANIEL GRANGER.

AFTER luncheon that day, Clarissa lost sight of Lady Laura. The Castle seemed particularly quiet on this afternoon. Nearly every one was out of doors playing croquet; but Clarissa had begun to find croquet rather a wearisome business of late, and had excused herself on the plea of letters to write. She had not begun her letter-writing yet, however, but was wandering about the house in a purposeless way—now standing still for a quarter of an hour at a time, looking out of a window, without being in the least degree conscious of the landscape she was looking at, and then pacing slowly up and down the long picture-gallery with a sense of relief in being alone.

At last she roused herself from this absent dreamy state.

'I am too idle to write this afternoon,' she thought. 'I'll go to the library and get a book.'

The Hale library was Clarissa's delight. It was a noble collection gathered by dead-and-gone owners of the Castle, and filled up with all the most famous modern works at the bidding of Mr. Armstrong, who gave his bookseller a standing order to supply everything that was proper, and rarely for his own individual amusement or instruction had recourse to any shelf but one which contained neat editions of the complete works of the Druid and Mr. Apperley, the *Life of Assheton Smith*, and all the volumes of the original *Sporting Magazine* bound in crimson russia. These, with *Ruff's Guide*, the *Racing Calendar*, and a few volumes on farriery, supplied Mr. Armstrong's literary necessities. But to Clarissa, for whom books were at once the pleasure and consolation of life, this library seemed a treasure-house of inexhaustible delights. Her father's collection was of the choicest, but limited. Here she found everything she had ever heard of, and a whole world of literature she had never dreamed of. She was not by any means a pedant or a blue-stocking, and it was naturally amongst the books of a lighter class she found the chief attraction; but she was better read than most girls of her age, and better able to enjoy solid reading.

To-day she was out of spirits, and came to the library for some relief from those vaguely painful thoughts that had oppressed her lately. The room was so little affected by my lady's butterfly guests that she made sure of having it all to herself this afternoon, when the voices and laughter of the croquet-players, floating in at the open windows, told her that the sport was still at its height.

She went into the room, and stopped suddenly a few paces from the doorway. A gentleman was standing before the wide empty fire-place, where there was a great dog-stove of ironwork and brass which consumed about half a ton of coal a day in winter; a tall ponderous-looking man, with his hands behind him, glancing downward with cold gray eyes, but not in the least degree inclining his stately head, to listen to Lady Laura Armstrong, who was seated on a sofa near him, fanning herself and prattling gaily after her usual vivacious manner.

Clarissa started and drew back at sight of this tall stranger.

'Mr. Granger,' she thought, and tried to make her escape without being seen.

The attempt was a failure. Lady Laura called to her.

'Who is that in a white dress? Miss Lovel, I am sure.—Come here, Clary—what are you running away for? Let me present you to my friend Mr. Granger.—Mr. Granger, this is Miss Lovel, the Miss Lovel whose birth-place fortune has given to you.'

Mr. Granger bowed rather stiffly, and with the air of a man to whom a bow was a matter of business.

'I regret,' he said, 'to have robbed Miss Lovel of a home to which she was attached. I regret still more that she will not avail herself of my desire to consider the park and grounds entirely at her disposal on all occasions. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see her use the place as if it were her own.'

'And nothing could be kinder than such a wish on your part,' exclaimed my lady approvingly.

Clarissa lifted her eyes rather shyly to the rich man's face. He was not a connoisseur in feminine loveliness, but they struck him at once as very fine eyes. He was a connoisseur in pictures, and no mean judge of them, and those brilliant hazel eyes of Clarissa's reminded him of a portrait by Velasquez of which he was particularly proud.

'You are very kind,' she murmured; 'but—but there are some associations too painful to bear. The

park would remind me so bitterly of all I have lost since I was a child.'

She was thinking of her brother, and his disgrace —or misfortune; she did not even know which of these two it was that had robbed her of him. Mr. Granger looked at her wonderingly. Her words and manner seemed to betray a deeper feeling than he could have supposed involved in the loss of an estate. He was not a man of sentiment himself, and had gone through life affected only by its sternest realities. There was something rather too Rosa-Matilda-ish for his taste in this faltered speech of Clarissa's; but he thought her a very pretty girl nevertheless, and was inclined to look somewhat indulgently upon a weakness he would have condemned without compunction in his daughter. Mr. Granger was a man who prided himself upon his strength of mind, and he had a very poor idea of the exclusive recluse whose early extravagances had made him master of Arden Court. He had not seen Mr. Lovel half-a-dozen times in his life, for all business between those two that could be transacted by their respective lawyers had been so transacted; but what he had seen of that pale careworn face, that fragile figure and somewhat irritable manner, had led the ponderous strong-

minded Daniel Granger to consider Marmaduke Lovel a very poor creature.

He was interested in this predecessor of his nevertheless. A man must be harder than iron who can usurp another man's home, and sit by another man's hearthstone, without giving some thought to the exile he has ousted. Daniel Granger was not so hard as that, and he did profoundly pity the ruined gentleman he had deposed. Perhaps he was still more inclined to pity the ruined gentleman's only daughter, who must needs suffer for the sins and an errors of others.

'Now, pray don't run away, Clary,' cried Lady Laura, seeing Clarissa moving towards the door, as if still anxious to escape. 'You came to look for some books, I know.—Miss Lovel is a very clever young lady, I assure you, Mr. Granger, and has read immensely.—Sit down, Clary; you shall take away an armful of books by and by, if you like.'

Clarissa seated herself near my lady's sofa with a gracious submissive air which the owner of Arden Court thought a rather pretty kind of thing, in its way. He had a habit of classifying all young women in a general way with his own daughter, as if in possessing that one specimen of the female race he

had a key to the whole species. His daughter was obedient, it was one of her chief virtues; but somehow there was not quite such a graceful air in her small concessions as he perceived in this little submission of Miss Lovel's.

Mr. Granger was rather a silent man; but my lady rattled on gaily in her accustomed style, and while that perennial stream of small-talk flowed on, Clarissa had leisure to observe the usurper.

He was a tall man, six feet high perhaps, with a powerful and somewhat bulky frame, broad shoulders, a head erect and firmly planted as an obelisk, and altogether an appearance which gave a general idea of strength. He was not a bad-looking man by any means. His features were large and well-cut, the mouth firm as iron, and unshadowed by beard or moustache; the eyes gray and clear, but very cold. Such a man could surely be cruel, Clarissa thought, with an inward shudder. He was a man who would have looked grand in a judge's wig; a man whose eyes and eyebrows, lowered upon some trembling delinquent, might have been almost as awful as Lord Thurlow's. Even his own light-brown hair, faintly streaked with gray, which he wore rather long, had something of a leonine air.

He listened to Lady Laura's trivial discourse with a manner which was no doubt meant to be gracious, but with no great show of interest. Once he went so far as to remark that the Castle gardens were looking very fine for so advanced a season, and attended politely to my lady's rather diffuse account of her triumphs in the orchid line.

'I don't pretend to understand much about those things,' he said in his stately far-off way, as if he lived in some world quite remote from Lady Laura's, and of a superior rank in the catalogue of worlds. 'They are pretty and curious, no doubt. My daughter interests herself considerably in that sort of thing. We have a good deal of glass at Arden, more than I care about. My head man tells me that I must have grapes and pines all the year round; and since he insists upon it, I submit. But I imagine that a good many more of his pines and grapes find their way to Covent-garden than to my table.'

Clarissa remembered the old kitchen-gardens at the Court in her father's time, when the whole extent of 'glass' was comprised by a couple of dilapidated cucumber-frames, and a queer little greenhouse in a corner, where she and her brother had made some primitive experiments in horticulture, and where

there was a particular race of spiders, the biggest specimens of the spidery species it had ever been her horror to encounter.

'I wonder whether the little greenhouse is there still,' she thought. 'O, no, no; battered down to the ground, of course, by this pompous man's order. I don't suppose I should know the dear old place, if I were to see it now.'

'You are fond of botany, I suppose, Miss Lovel?' Mr. Granger asked presently, with a palpable effort. He was not an adept in small-talk, and though in the course of years of dinner-eating and dinner-giving he had been frequently called upon to address his conversation to young ladies, he never opened his lips to one of the class without a sense of constraint and an obvious difficulty. He had all his life been most at home in men's society, where the talk was of grave things, and was no bad talker when the question in hand was either commercial or political. But as a rich man cannot go through life without being cultivated more or less by the frivolous herd, Mr. Granger had been compelled to conform himself somehow to the requirements of civilised society, and to talk in his stiff bald way of things which he neither understood nor cared for.

'I am fond of flowers,' Clarissa answered, 'but I really know nothing of botany. I would always rather paint them than anatomise them.'

'Indeed! Painting is a delightful occupation for a young lady. My daughter sketches a little, but I cannot say that she has any remarkable talent that way. She has been well taught, of course.'

'You will find Miss Lovel quite a first-rate artist,' said Lady Laura, pleased to praise her favourite. 'I really know no one of her age with such a marked genius for art. Everybody observes it.' And then, half afraid that this praise might seem to depreciate Miss Granger, the good-natured châtelaine went on, 'Your daughter illuminates, I daresay?'

'Well, yes, I suppose so, Lady Laura. I know that Sophia does some messy kind of work involving the use of gums and colours. I have seen her engaged in it sometimes. And there are scriptural texts on the walls of our poor-schools which I conclude are her work. A young woman cannot have too many pursuits. I like to see my daughter occupied.'

'Miss Granger reads a good deal, I suppose, like Clarissa,' Lady Laura hazarded.

'No, I cannot say that she does. My daughter's

habits are active and energetic rather than studious. Nor should I encourage her in giving much time to literature, unless the works she read were of a very solid character. I have never found anything great achieved by reading men of my own acquaintance; and directly I hear that a man is never so happy as in his library, I put him down as a man whose life will be a failure.'

'But the great men of our day have generally been men of wide reading, have they not?'

'I think not, Lady Laura. They have been men who have made a little learning go a long way. Of course there are numerous exceptions amongst the highest class of all—statesmen, and so on. But for success in active life, I take it, a man cannot have his brain too clear of waste rubbish in the way of book-learning. He wants all his intellectual coin in his current account, you see, ready for immediate use, not invested in out-of-the-way corners, where he can't get at it.'

While Mr. Granger and my lady were arguing this question, Clarissa went to the bookshelves and amused herself hunting for some attractive volumes. Daniel Granger followed the slender girlish figure with curious eyes. Nothing could have been more un-

expected than this meeting with Marmaduke Lovel's daughter. He had done his best, in the first year or so of his residence at the Court, to cultivate friendly relations with Mr. Lovel, and had most completely failed in that well-meant attempt. Some men in Mr. Granger's position might have been piqued by this coldness. But Daniel Granger was not such a one; he was not given to undervalue the advantage of his friendship or patronage. A career of unbroken prosperity, and a character by nature self-contained and strong-willed, combined to sustain his belief in himself. He could not for a moment conceive that Mr. Lovel declined his acquaintance as a thing not worth having. He therefore concluded that the banished lord of Arden felt his loss too keenly to endure to look upon his successor's happiness, and he pitied him accordingly. It would have been the one last drop of bitterness in Marmaduke Lovel's cup to know that this man did pity him. Having thus failed in cultivating anything approaching intimacy with the father, Mr. Granger was so much the more disposed to feel an interest—half curious, half compassionate—in the daughter. From the characterless ranks of young-lady-hood this particular damsel stood out with unwonted distinctness. He found his mind wander-

ing a little as he tried to talk with Lady Laura. He could not help watching the graceful figure yonder, the slim white-robed figure standing out so sharply against the dark background of carved oaken book-shelves.

Clarissa selected a couple of volumes to carry away with her presently, and then came back to her seat by Lady Laura's sofa. She did not want to appear rude to Mr. Granger, or to disoblige her kind friend, who for some reason or other was evidently anxious she should remain, or she would have been only too glad to run away to her own room.

The talk went on. My lady was confidential after her manner, communicating her family affairs to Daniel Granger as freely as she might have done if he had been an uncle or an executor. She told him about her sister's approaching marriage and George Fairfax's expectations.

'They will have to begin life upon an income that I daresay *you* would think barely sufficient for bread and cheese,' she said.

Mr. Granger shook his head, and murmured that his own personal requirements could be satisfied for thirty shillings a week.

'I daresay. It is generally the case with millionaires. They give four hundred a year to a cook, and dine upon a mutton-chop or a boiled chicken. But really Mr. Fairfax and Geraldine will be almost poor at first; only my sister has fortunately no taste for display, and George must have sown all his wild-oats by this time. I expect them to be a model couple, they are so thoroughly attached to each other.'

Clarissa opened one of her volumes and bent over it at this juncture. Was this really true? Did Lady Laura believe what she said? Was that problem which she had been perpetually trying to solve lately so very simple, after all, and only a perplexity to her own weak powers of reason? Lady Laura must be the best judge, of course, and she was surely too warm-hearted a woman to take a conventional view of things, or to rejoice in a mere marriage of convenience. No, it must be true. They really did love each other, these two, and that utter absence of all those small signs and tokens of attachment which Clarissa had expected to see was only a characteristic of good taste. What she had taken for coldness was merely a natural reserve, which at once proved their superior breeding and rebuked her own vulgar curiosity.

From the question of the coming marriage Lady Laura flew to the lighter subject of the ball.

'I hope Miss Granger has brought a ball-dress. I told her all about our ball in my last note.'

'I believe she has provided herself for the occasion,' replied Mr. Granger. 'I know there was an extra trunk, to which I objected when my people were packing the luggage. Sophia is not usually extravagant in the matter of dress. She has a fair allowance, of course, and liberty to exceed it on occasion; but I believe she spends more upon her school-children and pensioners in the village than on her toilet.'

'Your ideas on the subject of costume are not quite so wide as Mr. Brummel's, I suppose,' said my lady. 'Do you remember his reply, when an anxious mother asked him what she ought to allow her son for dress?'

Mr. Granger did not spoil my lady's delight in telling an anecdote by remembering; and he was a man who would have conscientiously declared his familiarity with the story, had he known it.

'"It might be done on eight hundred a year, madam," replied Brummel, "with the strictest economy."'

Mr. Granger gave a single-knock kind of laugh.

'Curious fellow, that Brummel,' he said. 'I remember seeing him at Caen, when I was travelling as a young man.'

And so the conversation meandered on, my lady persistently lively in her pleasant commonplace way, Mr. Granger still more commonplace, and not at all lively. Clarissa thought that hour and a half in the library the longest she had ever spent in her life. How different from that afternoon in the same room when George Fairfax had looked at his watch and declared the Castle bell must be wrong!

That infallible bell rang at last—a welcome sound to Clarissa, and perhaps not altogether unwelcome to Lady Laura and Mr. Granger, who had more than once sympathised in a smothered yawn.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. GRANGER IS INTERESTED.

WHEN Clarissa went to the great drawing-room dressed for dinner, she found Lizzie Fermor talking to a young lady whom she at once guessed to be Miss Granger. Nor was she allowed to remain in any doubt of the fact; for the lively Lizzie beckoned her to the window by which they were seated, and introduced the two young ladies to each other.

'Miss Granger and I are quite old friends,' she said, 'and I mean you to like each other very much.'

Miss Granger bowed stiffly, but pledged herself to nothing. She was a tall young woman of about two-and-twenty, with very little of the tender grace of girlhood about her; a young woman who, by right of a stately carriage and a pair of handsome shoulders, might have been called fine-looking. Her features were not unlike her father's; and those eyes

and eyebrows of Daniel Granger's, which would have looked so well under a judicial wig, were reproduced in a modified degree in the countenance of his daughter. She had what would be generally called a fine complexion, fair and florid; and her hair, of which she had an abundant quantity, was of an insipid light brown, and the straightest Clarissa had ever seen. Altogether, she was a young lady who, invested with all the extraneous charms of her father's wealth, would no doubt be described as attractive, and even handsome. She was dressed well, with a costly simplicity, in a dark-blue corded silk, relieved by a berthe of old point-lace, and the whiteness of her full firm throat was agreeably set-off by a broad band of black velvet from which there hung a Maltese cross of large rubies.

The two young ladies went on with their talk, which was chiefly of gaieties they had each assisted at since their last meeting, and people they had met.

Clarissa, being quite unable to assist in this conversation, looked on meekly, a little interested in Miss Granger, who was, like herself, an only daughter, and about whose relations with her father she had begun to wonder. Was he very fond of this only child, and in this, as in all else, unlike her own

father? He had spoken of her that afternoon several times, and had even praised her, but somewhat coldly, and with a practical matter-of-course air, almost as Mr. Lovel might have spoken of his daughter if constrained to talk of her in society.

Miss Granger said a good deal about the great people she had met that year. They seemed all to be more or less the elect of the earth: but she pulled herself up once or twice to protest that she cared very little for society; she was happier when employed with her schools and poor people—*that* was her real element.

'One feels all the other thing to be so purposeless and hollow,' she said sententiously. 'After a round of dinners and dances and operas and concerts in London, I always have a kind of guilty feeling. So much time wasted, and nothing to show for it. And really my poor are improving so wonderfully. If you could see my cottages, Miss Fermor!' (she did not say 'their cottages.') 'I give a prize for the cleanest floors and windows, an illuminated ticket for the neatest garden-beds. I don't suppose you could get a sprig of groundsel for love or money in Arden village. I have actually to cultivate it in a corner of the kitchen-garden for my canaries. I give

another prize at Christmas for the most economical household management, accorded to the family which has dined oftenest without meat in the course of the year; and I give a premium of one per cent upon all investments in the Holborough savings-bank—one and a half in the case of widows; a complete suit of clothes to every woman who has attended morning and evening service without missing one Sunday in the year, the consequence of which has been to put a total stop to cooking on the day of rest. I don't believe you could come across so much as a hot potato on a Sunday in one of my cottages.'

'And do the husbands like the cold dinners?' Miss Fermor asked rather flippantly.

'I should hope that spiritual advantage would prevail over temporal luxury, even in their half-awakened minds,' replied Miss Granger. 'I have never inquired about their feelings on the subject. I did indeed hear that the village baker, who had driven a profitable trade every Sunday morning before my improvements, made some most insolent comments upon what I had done. But I trust I can rise superior to the impertinence of a village baker. However, you must come to Arden and see my cottages, and judge for yourself; and if you could only

know the benighted state in which I found these poor creatures—'

Lizzie Fermor glanced towards Clarissa, and then gave a little warning look, which had the effect of stopping Miss Granger's disquisition.

'I beg your pardon, Miss Lovel,' she said; 'I forgot that I was talking of your own old parish. But you were a mere child, I believe, when you left the Court, and of course could not be capable of effecting much improvement.'

'We were too poor to do much, or to give prizes,' Clarissa answered; 'but we gave what we could, and —and I think the people were fond of us.'

Miss Granger looked as if this last fact were very wide from the question.

'I have never studied how to make the people fond of me,' she said. 'My constant effort has been to make them improve themselves and their own condition. All my plans are based upon that principle. "If you want a new gown, cloak, and bonnet at Christmas," I tell the women, "you must earn them by unfailing attendance at church. If you wish to obtain the money-gift I wish to give you, you must first show me something saved by your own economy and self-sacrifice." To my children I hold out

similar inducements—a prize for the largest amount of plain needlework, every stitch of which I make it my duty to examine through a magnifying glass; a prize for scrupulous neatness in dress; and for scripture knowledge. I have children in my Sunday-schools who can answer any question upon the Old-Testament history from Genesis to Chronicles.'

Clarissa gave a faint sigh, almost appalled by these wonders. She remembered the girls' Sunday-school in her early girlhood, and her own poor little efforts at instruction, in the course of which she had seldom carried her pupils out of the Garden of Eden, or been able to get over the rivers that watered that paradise, as described by the juvenile inhabitants of Arden, without little stifled bursts of laughter on her own part; while in the very midst of her most earnest endeavours, she was apt to find her brother Austin standing behind her, tempting the juvenile mind by the surreptitious offer of apples or walnuts. The attempts at teaching generally ended in merry laughter and the distribution of nuts and apples, with humble apologies to the professional schoolmistress for so useless an intrusion.

Miss Granger had no time to enlarge farther upon her manifold improvements before dinner, to

which she was escorted by one of the officers from Steepleton, the nearest garrison town, who happened to be dining there that day, and was very glad to get an innings with the great heiress. The master of Arden Court had the honour of escorting Lady Laura; but from his post by the head of the long table he looked more than once to that remote spot where Clarissa sat, not far from his daughter. My lady saw those curious glances, and was delighted to see them. They might mean nothing, of course; but to that sanguine spirit they seemed an augury of success for the scheme which had been for a long time hatching in the matron's busy brain.

'What do you think of my pet, Mr. Granger?' she asked presently.

Mr. Granger glanced at the ground near my lady's chair with rather a puzzled look, half expecting to see a Maltese spaniel or a flossy-haired Skye terrier standing on its hind legs.

'What do you think of my pet and protégée, Miss Lovel?'

'Miss Lovel! Well, upon my word, Lady Laura, I am so poor a judge of the merits of young ladies in a general way; but she really appears a very amiable young person.'

'And is she not lovely? asked Lady Laura, contemplating the distant Clarissa in a dreamy way through her double eyeglass. 'I think it is the sweetest face I ever saw.'

'She is certainly very pretty,' admitted Mr. Granger. 'I was struck by her appearance this afternoon in the library. I suppose there is something really out of the common in her face, for I am generally the most unobservant of men in such matters.'

'Out of the common!' exclaimed Lady Laura. 'My dear sir, it is such a face as you do not see twice in a lifetime. Madame Recamier must have been something like that, I should fancy—a woman who could attract the eyes of all the people in the great court of the Luxembourg, and divide public attention with Napoleon.'

Mr. Granger did not seem interested in the rather abstract question of Clarissa's possible likeness to Madame Recamier.

'She is certainly very pretty,' he repeated in a meditative manner; and stared so long and vacantly at a fricandeau which a footman was just offering him, that any less well-trained attendant must have left him in embarrassment.

The next few days were enlivened by a good deal of talk about the ball, in which event Miss Granger did not seem to take a very keen interest.

'I go to balls, of course,' she said; 'one is obliged to do so: for it would seem so ungracious to refuse one's friends' invitations; but I really do not care for them. They are all alike, and the rooms are always hot.'

'I don't think you will be able to say that here,' replied Miss Fermor. 'Lady Laura's arrangements are always admirable; and there is to be an impromptu conservatory under canvas the whole length of the terrace, in front of the grand saloon where we are to dance, so that the six windows can be open all the evening.'

'Then I daresay it will be a cold night,' said Miss Granger, who was not prone to admire other people's cleverness. 'I generally find that it is so, when people take special precautions against heat.'

Clarissa naturally found herself thrown a good deal into Sophia Granger's society; but though they worked, and drove, and walked together, and played croquet, and acted in the same charades, it is doubtful whether there was really much more sympathy between these two than between Clarissa and Lady

Geraldine. There was perhaps less; for Clarissa Lovel had been interested in Geraldine Challoner, and she was not in the faintest degree interested in Miss Granger. The cold and shining surface of that young lady's character emitted no galvanic spark. It was impossible to deny that she was wise and accomplished; that she did everything well that she attempted; that, although obviously conscious of her own supreme advantages as the heiress to a great fortune, she was benignly indulgent to the less blessed among her sex,—it was impossible to deny all this; and yet it was not any more easy to get on with Sophia Granger than with Lady Geraldine.

One day, after luncheon, when a bevy of girls were grouped round the piano in the billiard-room, Lizzie Fermor—who indulged in the wildest latitude of discourse—was audacious enough to ask Miss Granger how she would like her father to marry again.

The faultless Sophia elevated her well-marked eyebrows with a look of astonishment that ought to have frozen Miss Fermor. The eyebrows were as hard and as neatly pencilled as the shading in Miss Granger's landscapes.

'Marry again!' she repeated, 'papa!—if you knew

him better, Miss Fermor, you would never speculate upon such a thing. Papa will never marry again.'

'Has he promised you that?' asked the irrepressible Lizzie.

'I do not require any promise from him. I know him too well to have the slightest doubt upon the subject. Papa might have married brilliantly, again and again, since I was a little thing.' (It was rather difficult to fancy Miss Granger a 'little thing' in any stage of her existence.) 'But nothing has ever been more remote from his ideas than a second marriage. I have heard people regret it.'

'*You* have not regretted it, of course.'

'I hope I know my duty too well, to wish to stand between papa and his happiness. If it had been for his happiness to marry—a person of a suitable age and position, of course—I should not have considered my own feelings in the matter.'

'Well, I suppose not,' replied Lizzie, rather doubtfully; 'still it is nice to have one's father all to oneself—to say nothing of being an heiress. And the worst of the business is, that when a widower of your papa's age does take it into his head to marry, he is apt to fall in love with some chit of a girl.'

Miss Granger stared at the speaker with a gaze

as stony as Antigone herself could have turned upon any impious jester who had hinted that Œdipus, in his blindness and banishment, was groping for some frivolous successor to Jocasta.

'My father in love with a girl!' she exclaimed. 'What a very false idea you must have formed of his character, Miss Fermor, when you can suggest such an utter absurdity!'

'But, you see, I wasn't speaking of Mr. Granger, only of widowers in general. I have seen several marriages of that kind—men of forty or fifty throwing themselves away, I suppose one ought to say, upon girls scarcely out of their teens. In some cases the marriage seems to turn out well enough; but of course one does sometimes hear of things not going on quite happily.'

Miss Granger was grave and meditative after this—perhaps half disposed to suspect Elizabeth Fermor of some lurking design on her father. She had been seated at the piano during this conversation, and now resumed her playing—executing a sonata of Beethoven's with faultless precision and the highest form of taught expression; so much emphasis upon each note—a careful *rallentando* here, a gradual *crescendo* there; nothing careless or slapdash from

the first bar to the last. She would play the same piece a hundred times without varying the performance by a hair's-breadth. Nor did she affect anything but classical music. She was one of those young ladies who, when asked for a waltz or a polka, freeze the impudent demander by replying that they play no dance music—nothing more frivolous than Mozart.

The day for the ball came, but there was no George Fairfax. Lady Geraldine had arrived at the Castle on the evening before the festival, bringing an excellent account of her father's health. He had been cheered by her visit, and was altogether so much improved, that his doctors would have given him permission to come down to Yorkshire for his daughter's wedding. It was only his own valetudinarian habits and extreme dread of fatigue which had prevented Lady Geraldine bringing him down in triumph.

Lady Laura was loudly indignant at Mr. Fairfax's non-appearance; and for the first time Clarissa heard Lady Geraldine defend her lover with some natural and womanly air of proprietorship.

'After pledging his word to me as he did!' exclaimed my lady, when it had come to luncheon-time

and there were still no signs of the delinquent's return.

'But really, Laura, there is no reason he should not keep his word,' Geraldine answered, with her serene air. 'You know men like to do these things in a desperate kind of way—as if they were winning a race. I daresay he has made his plans so as not to leave himself more than half an hour's margin, and will reach the Castle just in time to dress.'

'That is all very well; but I don't call that keeping his promise to me, to come rushing into the place just as we are beginning to dance; after travelling all night perhaps, and knocking himself up in all sorts of ways, and with no more animation or vivacity left in him than a man who is walking in his sleep. Besides, he ought to consider our anxiety.'

'Your anxiety, if you please, Laura. I am not anxious. I cannot see that George's appearance at the ball is a matter of such vital importance.'

'But, my dear Geraldine, it would seem so strange for him to be away. People would wonder so.'

'Let them wonder,' Lady Geraldine replied, with a little haughty backward movement of her head, which was natural to her.

Amongst the cases and packages which had been perpetually arriving from London during the last week or so, there was one light deal box which Lady Laura's second maid brought to Clarissa's room one morning with her mistress's love. The box contained the airiest and most girlish of ball-dresses, all cloudlike white tulle, and the most entrancing wreath of wild-roses and hawthorn, such a wreath as never before had crowned Miss Lovel's bright-brown hair. Of course there was the usual amount of thanks and kissing and raptures.

'I am responsible to your father for your looking your best, you see, Clary,' Lady Laura said, laughing; 'and I intend you to make quite a sensation to-night. The muslin you meant to wear is very pretty, and will do for some smaller occasion; but to-night is a field-night. Be sure you come to me when you are dressed. I shall be in my own rooms till the people begin to arrive; and I want to see you when Fosset has put her finishing touches to your dress.'

Clarissa promised to present herself before her kind patroness. She was really pleased with her dress, and sincerely grateful to the giver. Lady Laura was a person from whom it was easy to accept

benefits. There was something bounteous and expansive in her nature, and her own pleasure in the transaction made it impossible for any but the most churlish recipient to feel otherwise than pleased.

CHAPTER XIII.

OPEN TREASON.

THE ball began, and without the assistance of Mr. Fairfax—much to my lady's indignation. She was scarcely consoled by the praises and compliments she received on the subject of her arrangements and decorations; but these laudations were so unanimous and so gratifying, that she did at last forget Mr. Fairfax's defection in the delight of such perfect success.

The Duke—the one sovereign magnate of that district—a tall grand-looking old man with white hair, even deigned to be pleased and surprised by what she had done.

'But then you have such a splendid platform to work upon,' he said; 'I don't think we have a place in Yorkshire that can compare with Hale. You had your decorators from London, of course?'

'No, indeed, your grace,' replied my lady, sparkling with delighted pride; 'and if there is anything I can boast of, it is that. Fred wanted me to send for London people, and have the thing done in their wholesale manner—put myself entirely into their hands, give them *carte blanche*, and so on; so that, till the whole business was finished, I shouldn't have known what the place was to be like; but that is just the kind of arrangement I detest. So I sent for one of my Holborough men, told him my ideas, gave him a few preliminary sketches, and after a good many consultations and discussions, we arrived at our present notion. "Abolish every glimmer of gas," I said, "and give me plenty of flowers and wax-candles. The rest is mere detail." '

Everything was successful; Miss Granger's prophecy of cold weather was happily unfulfilled. The night was unusually still and sultry, a broad harvest moon steeping terraces and gardens in tender mellow light; not a breath to stir the wealth of blossoms, or to flutter the draperies of the many windows, all wide open to the warm night—a night of summer at the beginning of autumn.

Clarissa found herself in great request for the dances, and danced more than she had done since the

days of her schoolgirl waltzes and polkas in the playroom at Belforêt. It was about an hour after the dancing had begun, when Lady Laura brought her no less a partner than Mr. Granger, who had walked a solemn quadrille or two with a stately dowager, and whose request was very surprising to Clarissa. She had one set of quadrilles, however, unappropriated on her card, and expressed herself at Mr. Granger's disposal for that particular dance, and then tripped away, to be whirled round the great room by one of her military partners.

Daniel Granger stood amongst the loungers at one end of the room, watching that aerial revolving figure. Yes, Lady Laura was right; she was very lovely. In all his life he had never before paid much heed to female loveliness, any more than to the grandeurs and splendours of nature, or anything beyond the narrow boundary of his own successful commonplace existence. But in this girl's face there was something that attracted his attention, and dwelt in his memory when he was away from her; perhaps, after all, it was the result of her position rather than her beauty. It was natural that he should be interested in her, poor child. He had robbed her of her home, or it would seem so to her, no doubt; and

she had let him see that she set an exaggerated value on that lost home, that she clung to it with a morbid sentimentality.

'I should not wonder if she hates me,' he said to himself.

He had never thought as much about her father, but then certainly he had never been brought into such close contact with her father.

He waited quietly for that appointed quadrille, declining a dance in which Lady Laura would have enlisted him, and keeping a close watch upon Clarissa during the interval. What a gay butterfly creature she seemed to-night! He could scarcely fancy this was the same girl who had spoken so mournfully of her lost home in the library that afternoon. He looked from her to his daughter for a moment, comparing the two; Sophia resplendent in pink areophane and pearls, and showing herself not above the pleasures of a polka; eminently a fine young woman, but O, of what a different clay from that other one!

Once Miss Fermor, passing the rich man on the arm of her partner, surprised the watchful gray eyes with a new look in them—a look that was neither cold nor stern.

'So, my gentleman,' thought the lively Lizzie, 'is it that way your fancies are drifting? It was I whom you suspected of dangerous designs the other day, Miss Granger. Take care your papa doesn't fall into a deeper pitfall. I should like to see him marry again, if it were only to take down that great pink creature's insolence.' Whereby it will be seen that Miss Granger was not quite so popular among her contemporaries as, in the serenity of her self-possessed soul, she was wont to imagine herself.

The quadrille began presently, and Clarissa walked through its serious mazes with the man whom she was apt to consider the enemy of her race. She could not help wondering a little to find herself in this position, and her replies to Mr. Granger's commonplace remarks were somewhat mechanical.

Once he contrived to bring the conversation round to Arden Court.

'It would give me so much pleasure to see you there as my daughter's guest,' he said, in a warmer tone than was usual to him, 'and I really think you would be interested in her parish-work. She has done wonders in a small way.'

'I have no doubt. You are very kind,' faltered

Clarissa; 'but I do not the least understand how to manage people as Miss Granger does, and I could not bear to come to the Court. I was so happy there with my brother, and now that he is gone, and that I am forbidden even to mention his name, the associations of the place would be too painful.'

Mr. Granger grew suddenly grave and silent.

'Yes, there was that business about the brother,' he thought to himself; 'a bad business no doubt, or the father would never have turned him out of doors—something very queer perhaps. A strange set these Lovels evidently. The father a spendthrift, the son something worse.'

And then he looked down at Clarissa, and thought again how lovely she was, and pitied her for her beauty and her helplessness—the daughter of such a father, the sister of such a brother.

'But she will marry well, of course,' he said to himself, just as George Fairfax had done; 'all these young fellows seem tremendously struck by her. I suppose she is the prettiest girl in the room. She will make a good match, I daresay, and get out of her father's hands. It must be a dreary life for her in that cottage, with a selfish disappointed man.'

The night waned, and there was no George

Fairfax. Lady Geraldine bore herself bravely, and danced a good deal more than she would have done, had there not been appearances to be kept up. She had to answer a great many questions about her lover, and she answered all with supreme frankness. He was away in Scotland with some bachelor friends, enjoying himself no doubt. He promised to be with them to-night, and had broken his promise; that was all—she was not afraid of any accident.

'I daresay he found the grouse-shooting too attractive,' she said coolly.

After supper, while the most determined of the waltzers were still spinning round to a brisk *deux temps* of Charles d'Albert's, Clarissa was fain to tell the last of her partners she could dance no more.

'I am not tired of the ball,' she said; 'I like looking on, but I really can't dance another step. Do go and get some one else for this waltz; I know you are dying to dance it.'

This was to the devoted Captain Westleigh, a person with whom Miss Lovel always felt very much at home.

'With *you*,' he answered tenderly. 'But if you mean to sit down, I am at your service. I would not desert you for worlds. And you really are look-

ing a little pale. Shall we find some pleasanter place? That inner room looks deliciously cool.'

He offered his arm to Clarissa, and they walked slowly away towards a small room at the end of the saloon; a room which Lady Laura had arranged with an artful eye to effect, leaving it almost in shadow. There were only a few wax-candles glimmering here and there among the cool dark foliage of the ferns and pitcher-plants that filled every niche and corner, and the moonlight shone full into the room through a wide window that opened upon a stone balcony a few feet above the terrace.

'If I am left alone with her for five minutes, I am sure I shall propose,' Captain Westleigh thought, on beholding the soft secluded aspect of this apartment, which was untenanted when he and Clarissa entered it.

She sank down upon a sofa near the window, more thoroughly tired than she had confessed. This long night of dancing and excitement was quite a new thing to her. It was nearly over now, and the reaction was coming, bringing with it that vague sense of hopelessness and disappointment which had so grown upon her of late. She had abandoned herself fully to the enchantment of the ball, almost

losing the sense of her own identity in that brilliant scene. But self-consciousness came back to her now, and she remembered that she was Clarissa Lovel, for whom life was at best a dreary business.

'Can I get you anything?' asked the Captain, alarmed by her pallor.

'Thanks, you are very kind. If it would not be too much trouble—I know the refreshment-room is a long way off—but I should be glad of a little water.'

'I'll get some directly. But I really am afraid you are ill,' said the Captain, looking at her anxiously, scarcely liking to leave her for fear she should faint before he came back.

'No, indeed, I am not ill—only very tired. If you'll let me rest here a little without talking.'

She half closed her eyes. There was a dizziness in her head very much like the preliminary stage of fainting.

'My dear Miss Lovel, I should be a wretch to bore you. I'll go for the water this moment.'

He hurried away. Clarissa gave a long weary sigh, and that painful dizziness passed off in some degree. All she wanted was air, she thought, if there had been any air to be got that sultry night.

She rose from the sofa presently, and went out upon the balcony. Below her was the river; not a ripple upon the water, not a breath stirring the rushes on the banks. Between the balcony and the river there was a broad battlemented walk, and in the embrasures where cannon had once been there were great stone vases of geraniums and dwarf roses, which seemed only masses of dark foliage in the moonlight.

The Captain was some little time gone for that glass of water. Clarissa had forgotten him and his errand as she sat upon a bench in the balcony with her elbow leaning on the broad stone ledge, looking down at the water and thinking of her own life—thinking what it might have been if everything in the world had been different.

A sudden step on the walk below startled her, and a low voice said,

'I would I were a glove upon that hand, that I might kiss that cheek.'

She knew the voice directly, but was not less startled at hearing it just then. The step came near her, and in the next moment a dark figure had swung itself lightly upward from the path below, and George Fairfax was seated on the angle of the massive balustrade.

'Juliet!' he said, in the same low voice, 'what put it into your head to play Juliet to-night? As if you were not dangerous enough without that.'

'Mr. Fairfax, how could you startle me so? Lady Laura has been expecting you all the evening.'

'I suppose so. But you don't imagine I've been hiding in the garden all the evening, like the man in Tennyson's *Maud?* I strained heaven and earth to be here in time; but there was a breakdown between Edinburgh and Carlisle. Nothing very serious: an engine-driver knocked about a little, and a few passengers shaken and bruised more or less, but I escaped unscathed, and had to cool my impatience for half a dozen hours at a dingy little station where there was no refreshment for body or mind but a brown jug of tepid water and a big Bible. There I stayed till I was picked up by the night-mail, and here I am. I think I shall stand absolved by my lady when she reads the account of my perils in to-morrow's papers. People are just going away, I suppose. It would be useless for me to dress and put in an appearance now.'

'I think Lady Laura would be glad to see you. She has been very anxious, I know.'

'Her sisterly cares shall cease before she goes to sleep to-night. She shall be informed that I am in the house; and I will make my peace to-morrow morning.'

He did not go away however, and Clarissa began to feel that there was something embarrassing in her position. He had stepped lightly across the balustrade, and had seated himself very near her, looking down at her face.

'Clarissa, do you know what has happened to me since I have been away from this place?'

She looked up at him with an alarmed expression. It was the first time he had ever uttered her Christian name, but his tone was so serious as to make that a minor question.

'You cannot guess, I suppose,' he went on. 'I've made a discovery—a most perplexing, most calamitous discovery.'

'What is that?'

'I have found out that I love you.'

Her hand was lying on the broad stone ledge. He took it in his firm grasp, and held it as he went on:

'Yes, Clarissa; I had my doubts before I went away, but thought I was master of myself in this,

as I have been in other things, and fancied myself strong enough to strangle the serpent. But it would not be strangled, Clarissa; it has wound itself about my heart, and here I sit by your side dishonoured in my own sight, come what may—bound to one woman and loving another with all my soul—yes, with all my soul. What am I to do?'

'Your duty,' Clarissa answered, in a low steady voice.

Her heart was beating so violently that she wondered at her power to utter those two words. What was it that she felt—anger, indignation? Alas, no! Pride, delight, rapture, stirred that undisciplined heart. She knew now what was wanted to make her life bright and happy; she knew now that she had loved George Fairfax almost from the first. And her own duty—the duty she was bound in honour to perform—what was that? Upon that question she had not a moment's doubt. Her duty was to resign him without a murmur; never to let him know that he had touched her heart. Even after having done this, there would be much left to her—the knowledge that he had loved her.

'My duty! what is that?' he asked in a hoarse hard voice. 'To keep faith with Geraldine, whatso-

ever misery it may bring upon both of us? I am not one of those saints who think of everybody's happiness before their own, Clarissa. I am very human, with all humanity's selfishness. I want to be happy. I want a wife for whom I can feel something more than a cold well-bred liking. I did not think that it was in me to feel more than that. I thought I had outlived my capacity for loving, wasted the strength of my heart's youth on worthless fancies, spent all my patrimony of affection; but the light shines on me again, and I thank God that it is so. Yes, Clarissa, come what may, I thank my God that I am not so old a man in heart and feeling as I thought myself.'

Clarissa tried to stem the current of his talk, with her heart still beating stormily, but with semblance of exceeding calmness.

'I must not hear you talk in this wild way, Mr. Fairfax,' she said. 'I feel as if I had been guilty of a sin against Lady Geraldine in having listened so long. But I cannot for a moment think you are in earnest.'

'Do not play the jesuit, Clarissa. You *know* that I am in earnest.'

'Then the railway accident must have turned

your brain, and I can only hope that to-morrow morning will restore your reason.'

'Well, I am mad, if you like—madly in love with you. What am I to do? If with some show of decency I can recover my liberty—by an appeal to Lady Geraldine's generosity, for instance—believe me, I shall not break her heart; our mutual regard is the calmest, coolest sentiment possible—if I can get myself free from this engagement, will you be my wife, Clarissa?'

'No; a thousand times no.'

'You don't care for me, then? The madness is all on my side?'

'The madness—if you are really in earnest, and not carrying on some absurd jest—is all on your side.'

'Well, that seems hard. I was vain enough to think otherwise. I thought so strong a feeling on one side could not co-exist with perfect indifference on the other. I fancied there was something like predestination in this, and that my wandering unwedded soul had met its other half—it's an old Greek notion, you know, that men and women were made in pairs—but I was miserably mistaken, I suppose. How many lovers have you rejected since you left school, Miss Lovel?' he asked with a short

bitter laugh. 'Geraldine herself could not have given me my quietus more coldly.'

He was evidently wounded to the quick, being a creature spoiled by easy conquests, and would have gone on perhaps in the same angry strain, but there was a light step on the floor within, and Lady Laura Armstrong came quickly towards the balcony.

'My dearest Clary, Captain Westleigh tells me that you are quite knocked up—' she began; and then recognising the belated traveller, cried out, 'George Fairfax! Is it possible?'

'George Fairfax, my dear Lady Laura, and not quite so base a delinquent as he seems. I must plead guilty to pushing matters to the last limit; but I made my plans to be here at seven o'clock this evening, and should inevitably have arrived at that hour, but for a smash between Edinburgh and Carlisle.'

'An accident! Were you hurt?'

'Not so much as shaken; but the break-down lost me half a dozen hours. We were stuck for no end of time at a dingy little station whose name I forget, and when I did reach Carlisle, it was too late for any train to bring me on, except the night-mail, which does not stop at Holborough. I had to post

from York, and arrived about ten minutes ago—too late for anything except to prove to you that I did make heroic efforts to keep my word.'

'And how, in goodness' name, did you get here, to this room, without my seeing you?'

'From the garden. Finding myself too late to make an appearance in the ball-room, I prowled round the premises, listening to the sounds of revelry within; and then seeing Miss Lovel alone here—playing Juliet without a Romeo—I made so bold as to accost her and charge her with a message for you.'

'You are amazingly considerate; but I really cannot forgive you for having deferred your return to the last moment. You have quite spoilt Geraldine's evening, to say nothing of the odd look your absence must have to our friends. I shall tell her you have arrived, and I suppose that is all I can do. You must want some supper, by the bye: you'll find plenty of people in the dining-room.'

'No, thanks; I had some cold chicken and coffee at Carlisle. I'll ring for a soda-and-brandy when I get to my room, and that's all I shall do to-night. Good-night, Lady Laura; good-night, Miss Lovel.'

He dropped lightly across the balcony and van-

ished. Lady Laura stood in the window for a few moments in a meditative mood, and then, looking up suddenly, said,

'O, by the bye, Clarissa, I came to fetch you for another dance, the last quadrille, if you feel well enough to dance it. Mr. Granger wants you for a partner.'

'I don't think I can dance any more, Lady Laura. I refused Captain Westleigh the last waltz.'

'Yes, but a quadrille is different. However, if you are really tired, I must tell Mr. Granger so. What was George Fairfax saying to you just now? You both looked prodigiously serious.'

'I really don't know—I forget—it was nothing very particular,' Clarissa answered, conscious that she was blushing, and confused by that consciousness.

Lady Laura looked at her with a sharp scrutinising glance.

'I think it would have been better taste on George's part if he had taken care to relieve my sister's anxiety directly he arrived, instead of acting the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. I must go back to Mr. Granger with your refusal, Clarissa. O, here comes Captain Westleigh with some water.'

The Captain did appear at this very moment carrying a glass of that beverage, much to Clarissa's relief, for a tête-à-tête with Lady Laura was very embarrassing to her just now.

'My dear Miss Lovel, you must think me an utter barbarian,' exclaimed the Captain; 'but you really can't conceive the difficulties I've had to overcome. It seemed as if there wasn't a drop of iced water to be had in the Castle. If you'd wanted Strasburg pies or barley-sugar temples, I could have brought you them by cartloads. Moselle and Maraschino are the merest drugs in the market; but not a creature could I persuade to get me this glass of water. Of course the fellows all said, "Yes, sir;" and then went off and forgot all about me. And even when I had got my prize, I was waylaid by thirsty dowagers who wanted to rob me of it. It was like searching for the North-west Passage.'

Lady Laura had departed by this time. Clarissa drank some of the water and took the Captain's arm to return to the ball-room, which was beginning to look a little empty. On the threshold of the saloon they met Mr. Granger.

'I am so sorry to hear you are not well, Miss Lovel,' he said.

'Thank you, Mr. Granger, but I am really not ill—only too tired to dance any more.'

'So Lady Laura tells me — very much to my regret. I had hoped for the honour of dancing this quadrille with you.'

'If you knew how rarely Mr. Granger dances, you'd consider yourself rather distinguished, I think, Miss Lovel,' said the Captain, laughing.

'Well, no, I don't often dance,' replied Mr. Granger, with a shade of confusion in his manner; 'but really, such a ball as this quite inspires a man —and Lady Laura was good enough to wish me to dance.'

He remained by Clarissa's side as they walked back through the rooms. They were near the door when Miss Granger met them, looking as cold and prim in her pink crape and pearls as if she had that moment emerged from her dressing-room.

'Do you know how late it is, papa?' she asked, contemplating her parent with severe eyes.

'Well, no, one does not think of time upon such an occasion as this. I suppose it is late; but it would not do for us of the household to desert before the rest of the company.'

'I was thinking of saying good-night,' answered

Miss Granger. 'I don't suppose any one would miss me, or you either, papa, if we slipped away quietly; and I am sure you will have one of your headaches to-morrow morning.'

There is no weapon so useful in the hands of a dutiful child as some chronic complaint of its parent. A certain nervous headache from which Mr. Granger suffered now and then served the fair Sophia as a kind of rod for his correction on occasions.

'I am not tired, my dear.'

'O, papa, I know your constitution better than you do yourself. Poor Lady Laura, how worn out she must be!'

'Lady Laura has been doing wonders all the evening,' said Captain Westleigh. 'She has been as ubiquitous as Richmond at Bosworth, and she has the talent of never seeming tired.'

Clarissa took the first opportunity of saying good-night. If so important a person as the heiress of Arden Court could depart and not leave a void in the assembly, there could be assuredly no fear that she would be missed. Mr. Granger shook hands with her for the first time in his life as he wished her good-night, and then stood in the doorway watching her receding figure till it was beyond his ken.

'I like your friend Miss Lovel, Sophia,' he said to his daughter presently.

'Miss Lovel is hardly a friend of mine, papa,' replied that young lady somewhat sharply. 'I am not in the habit of making sudden friendships, and I have not known Miss Lovel a week. Besides which, she is not the kind of girl I care for.'

'Why not?' asked her father bluntly.

'One can scarcely explain that kind of thing. She is too frivolous for me to get on very well with her. She takes no real interest in my poor, in spite of her connection with Arden, or in church music. I think she hardly knows one *Te Deum* from another.'

'She is rather a nice girl, though,' said the Captain, who would fain be loyal to Clarissa, yet for whom the good opinion of such an heiress as Miss Granger could not be a matter of indifference —there was always the chance that she might take a fancy to him, as he put it to his brother-officers, and what a lucky hit that would be! 'She's a nice girl,' he repeated, 'and uncommonly pretty.'

'I was not discussing her looks, Captain Westleigh,' replied Miss Granger with some asperity;

'I was talking of her ideas and tastes, which are quite different from mine. I am sorry you let Lady Laura persuade you to dance with a girl like that, papa. You may have offended old friends, who would fancy they had a prior claim on your attention.'

Mr. Granger laughed at this reproof.

'I didn't think a quadrille was such a serious matter, Sophy,' he said. 'And then, you see, when a man of my age does make a fool of himself, he likes to have the prettiest girl in the room for his partner.'

Miss Granger made an involuntary wry face, as if she had been eating something nasty. Mr. Granger gave a great yawn, and, as the rooms by this time were almost empty, made his way to Lady Laura in order to offer his congratulations upon her triumph before retiring to rest.

For once in a way, the vivacious châtelaine of Hale Castle was almost cross.

'Do you really think the ball has gone off well?' she asked incredulously. 'It seems to me to have been an elaborate failure.' She was thinking of those two whom she had surprised tête-à-tête in the balcony, and wondering what George Fairfax

could have been saying to produce Clarissa's confusion. Clarissa was her protégée, and she was responsible to her sister Geraldine for any mischief brought about by her favourite.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MORNING AFTER.

The day after the ball was a broken straggling kind of day, after the usual manner of the to-morrow that succeeds a festival. Hale Castle was full to overflowing with guests who, having been invited to spend one night, were pressed to stay longer. The men spent their afternoon for the most part in the billiard-room, after a late lingering luncheon, at which there was a good deal of pleasant gossip. The women sat together in groups in the drawing-room, pretending to work, but all desperately idle. It was a fine afternoon, but no one cared for walking or driving. A few youthful enthusiasts did indeed get up a game at croquet, but even this soul-enthralling sport was pursued with a certain listlessness.

Mr. Fairfax and Lady Geraldine walked in the

garden. To all appearance, a perfect harmony prevailed between them. Clarissa, sitting alone in an oriel at the end of the drawing-room, watched them with weary eyes and a dull load at her heart, wondering about them perpetually, with a painful wonder.

If she could only have gone home, she thought to herself, what a refuge the dull quiet of her lonely life would have been! She had not slept five minutes since the festival of last night, but had lain tossing wearily from side to side, thinking of what George Fairfax had said to her—thinking of what might have been and could never be, and then praying that she might do her duty; that she might have strength to keep firmly to the right, if he should try to tempt her again.

He would scarcely do that, she thought. That wild desperate talk of last night was perhaps the merest folly—a caprice of the moment, the shallowest rodomontade, which he would be angry with himself for having spoken. She told herself that this was so; but she knew now, as she had not known before last night, that she had given this man her heart.

It would be a hard thing to remain at Hale to perform her part in the grand ceremonial of the

marriage, and yet keep her guilty secret hidden from every eye; above all, from his whom it most concerned. But there seemed no possibility of escape from this ordeal, unless she were to be really ill, and excused on that ground. She sat in the oriel that afternoon, wondering whether a painful headache, the natural result of her sleeplessness and hyper-activity of brain, might not be the beginning of some serious illness—a fever perhaps, which would strike her down for a time and make an end of all her difficulties.

She had been sitting in the window for a long time quite alone, looking out at the sunny garden and those two figures passing and repassing upon an elevated terrace, with such an appearance of being absorbed in each other's talk, and all-sufficient for each other's happiness. It seemed to Clarissa that she had never seen them so united before. Had he been laughing at her last night? she asked herself indignantly; was that balcony scene a practical joke? He had been describing it to Lady Geraldine perhaps this afternoon, and the two had been laughing together at her credulity. She was in so bitter a mood just now that she was almost ready to believe this.

She had been sitting thus a long time, tormented by her own thoughts, and hearing the commonplace chatter of those cheerful groups, now loud, now low, without the faintest feeling of interest, when a heavy step sounded on the floor near her, and looking up suddenly, she saw Mr. Granger approaching her solitary retreat. The cushioned seat in the oriel, the ample curtains falling on either side of her, had made a refuge in which she felt herself alone, and she was not a little vexed to find her retreat discovered.

The master of Arden Court drew a chair towards the oriel, and seated himself deliberately, with an evident intention of remaining. Clarissa was obliged to answer his courteous inquiries about her health, to admit her headache as an excuse for the heaviness of her eyes, and then to go on talking about everything he chose to speak of. He did not talk stupidly by any means, but rather stiffly, and with the air of a man to whom friendly converse with a young lady was quite a new thing. He spoke to her a good deal about the Court and its surroundings — which seemed to her an error in taste — and appeared anxious to interest her in all his improvements.

'You really must come and see the place, Miss Lovel,' he said. 'I shall be deeply wounded if you refuse.'

'I will come if you wish it,' Clarissa answered meekly; 'but you cannot imagine how painful the sight of the dear old house will be to me.'

'A little painful just for the first time, perhaps. But that sort of feeling will soon wear off. You will come, then? That is settled. I want to win your father's friendship if I can, and I look to you to put me in the right way of doing so.'

'You are very good, but papa is so reserved—eccentric, I suppose most people would call him—and he lives shut up in himself, as it were. I have never known him make a new friend. Even my uncle Oliver and he seem scarcely more than acquaintances; and yet I know my uncle would do anything to serve us, and I believe papa knows it too.'

'We must trust to time to break down that reserve, Miss Lovel,' Mr. Granger returned cheerily; 'and you will come to see us at the Court—that is understood. I want you to inspect Sophia's schools, and sewing classes, and cooking classes, and goodness knows what. There are plenty of the

people who remember you, and will be delighted to welcome you amongst them. I have heard them say how kind you were to them before you went abroad.'

'I had so little money,' said Clarissa, 'I could do hardly anything.'

'But, after all, money is not everything with that class of people. No doubt they like it better than anything in the present moment; but as soon as it is gone they forget it, and are not apt to be grateful for substantial benefits in the past. But past kindness they do remember. Even in my own experience, I have known men who have been ungrateful for large pecuniary benefits, and yet have cherished the memory of some small kindness; a mere friendly word perhaps, spoken at some peculiar moment in their lives. No, Miss Lovel, you will not find yourself forgotten at Arden.'

He was so very earnest in this assurance, that Clarissa could not help feeling that he meant to do her a kindness. She was ashamed of her unworthy prejudice against him, and roused herself with a great effort from her abstraction, in order to talk and listen to Mr. Granger with all due courtesy. Nor had she any farther opportunity of watching those two figures

pacing backward and forward upon the terrace; for Mr. Granger contrived to occupy her attention till the dressing-bell rang, and afforded her the usual excuse for hurrying away.

She was one of the last to return to the drawing-room, and to her surprise found Mr. Granger by her side, offering his arm in his stately way when the procession began to file off to the dining-room, oblivious of the claims which my lady's matronly guests might have upon him.

Throughout that evening Mr. Granger was more or less by Clarissa's side. His daughter, perceiving this with a scarcely concealed astonishment, turned a deaf ear to the designing compliments of Captain Westleigh (who told himself that a fellow might just as well go in for a good thing as not when he had a chance), and came across the room to take part in her parent's conversation. She even tried to lure him away on some pretence or other; but this was vain. He seemed rooted to his chair by Clarissa's side—she listlessly turning over a folio volume of steel plates, he pointing out landscapes and scenes which had been familiar to him in his continental rambles, and remarking upon them in a somewhat disjointed fashion—'Marathon, yes—rather flat, isn't

it? But the mountains make a fine background. We went there with guides one day, when I was a young man. The Acropolis—hum! ha!—very fine ruins, but a most inconvenient place to get at. Would you like to see Greece, Miss Lovel?'

Clarissa gave a little sigh—half pain, half rapture. What chance had she of ever treading that illustrious soil, of ever emerging from the bondage of her dull life? She glanced across the room to the distant spot where Lady Geraldine and George Fairfax sat playing chess. *He* had been there. She remembered his pleasant talk of his wanderings, on the night of their railroad journey.

'Who would not like to see Greece?' she said.

'Yes, of course,' Mr. Granger answered in his most prosaic way. 'It's a country that ought to be remarkably interesting; but unless one is very well up in its history, one is apt to look at everything in a vague uncertain sort of manner. A mountain here, and a temple there—and then the guides and that kind of people contrive to vulgarise everything somehow; and then there is always an alarm about brigands, to say nothing of the badness of the inns. I really think you would be disappointed in Greece, Miss Lovel.'

'Let me keep my dream,' Clarissa answered rather sadly; 'I am never likely to see the reality.'

'You cannot be sure of that; at your age all the world is before you.'

'You have read Grote, of course, Miss Lovel?' said Miss Granger, who had read every book which a young lady ought to have read, and who rather prided herself upon the solid nature of her studies.

'Yes, I have read a good deal of Grote,' Clarissa replied meekly.

Miss Granger looked at her as if she rather doubted this assertion, and would like to have come down upon her with some puzzling question about the Archons or the Areopagus, but thought better of it, and asked her father if he had been talking to Mr. Purdew.

Mr. Purdew was a landed gentleman of some standing, whose estate lay near Arden Court, and who had come with his wife and daughters to Lady Laura's ball.

'He is sitting over there, near the piano,' added Sophia; 'I expected to find you enjoying a chat with him.'

'I had my chat with Purdew after luncheon,' answered Mr. Granger; and then he went on turning

the leaves for Clarissa with a solemn air, and occasionally pointing out to her some noted feature in a landscape or city. His daughter stared at him in supreme astonishment. She had seen him conventionally polite to young ladies before to-night, but this was something more than conventional politeness. He kept his place all the evening, and all that Sophia could do was to remain on guard.

When Clarissa was lighting her candle at a table in the corridor, Mr. Fairfax came up to her for the first time since the previous night.

'I congratulate you on your conquest, Miss Lovel,' he said in a low voice.

She looked up at him with a pale startled face, for she had not known that he was near her till his voice sounded close in her ear. 'I don't understand you,' she stammered.

'O, of course not; young ladies never can understand that sort of thing. But I understand it very well, and it throws a pretty clear light upon our interview last night. I wasn't quite prepared for such wise counsel as you gave me then. I can see now whence came the strength of your wisdom. It is a victory worth achieving, Miss Lovel. It means Arden Court,—Yes, that's a very good portrait, isn't it?'

he went on in a louder key, looking up at rather a dingy picture, as a little cluster of ladies came towards the table; 'a genuine Sir Joshua, I believe.'

And then came the usual good-nights, and Clarissa went away to her room with those words in her ears, 'It means Arden Court.'

Could he be cruel enough to think so despicably of her as this? Could he suppose that she wanted to attract the attention of a man old enough to be her father, only because he was rich and the master of the home she loved? The fact is that Mr. Fairfax —not too good or high-principled a man at the best of times, and yet accounting himself an honourable gentleman—was angry with himself and the whole world, most especially angry with Clarissa, because she had shown herself strong where he had thought to find her weak. Never before had his vanity been so deeply wounded. He had half resolved to sacrifice himself for this girl—and behold, she cared nothing for him!

CHAPTER XV.

CHIEFLY PATERNAL.

THE preparations for the wedding went on. Clarissa's headache did not develop into a fever, and she had no excuse for flying from Hale Castle. Her father, who had written Lady Laura Armstrong several courteous little notes expressing his gratitude for her goodness to his child, surprised Miss Lovel very much by appearing at the Castle one fine afternoon to make a personal acknowledgment of his thankfulness. He consented to remain to dinner, though protesting that he had not dined away from home—except at his brother-in-law's—for a space of years.

'I am a confirmed recluse, my dear Lady Laura, a worn-out old bookworm, with no better idea of enjoyment than a good fire and a favourite author,' he said; 'and I really feel myself quite unfitted for

civilised society. But you have a knack at commanding, and to hear is to obey; so if you insist upon it, and will pardon my morning-dress, I remain.'

Mr. Lovel's morning-dress was a suit of rather clerical-looking black from a fashionable West-end tailor—a costume that would scarcely outrage the proprieties of a patrician dinner-table.

'Clarissa shall show you the gardens between this and dinner-time,' exclaimed Lady Laura. 'It's an age since you've seen them, and I want to know your opinion of my improvements. Besides, you must have so much to say to her.'

Clarissa blushed, remembering how very little her father ever had to say to her of a confidential nature, but declared that she would be very pleased to show him the gardens; so after a little more talk with my lady they set out together.

'Well, Clary,' Mr. Lovel began, with his kindest air, 'you are making a long stay of it.'

'Too long, papa. I should be so glad to come home. Pray don't think me ungrateful to Lady Laura, she is all goodness; but I am so tired of this kind of life, and I do so long for the quiet of home.'

'Tired of this kind of life! Did ever any one

hear of such a girl! I really think there are some people who would be tired of Paradise. Why, child, it is the making of you to be here! If I were as rich as—as that fellow Granger, for instance; confound Crœsus!—I couldn't give you a better chance. You must stay here as long as that good-natured Lady Laura likes to have you; and I hope you'll have booked a rich husband before you come home. I shall be very much disappointed if you haven't.'

'I wish you would not talk in that way, papa; nothing would ever induce me to marry for money.'

'*For* money; no, I suppose not,' replied Mr. Lovel testily; 'but you might marry a man *with* money. There's no reason that a rich man should be inferior to the rest of his species. I don't find anything so remarkably agreeable in poor men.'

'I am not likely to marry foolishly, papa, or to offend you in that way,' Clarissa answered with a kind of quiet firmness, which her father inwardly execrated as 'infernal obstinacy;' 'but no money in the world would be the faintest temptation to me.'

'Humph! Wait till some Yorkshire squire offers you a thousand a year pin-money; you'll change your tone then, I should hope. Have you seen anything of that fellow Granger, by the way?'

'I have seen a good deal of Mr. and Miss Granger, papa. They have been staying here for a fortnight, and are here now.'

'You don't say so! Then I shall be linked into an intimacy with the fellow. Well, it is best to be neighbourly, perhaps. And how do you like Mr. Granger?'

'He is not a particularly unpleasant person, papa; rather stiff and matter-of-fact, but not ungentlemanly; and he has been especially polite to me, as if he pitied me for having lost Arden.'

In a general way Mr. Lovel would have been inclined to protest against being pitied, either in his own person or that of his belongings, by such a man as Daniel Granger. But in his present humour it was not displeasing to him to find that the owner of Arden Court had been especially polite to Clarissa.

'Then he is really a nice fellow, this Granger, eh, Clary?' he said airily.

'I did not say nice, papa.'

'No, but civil and good-natured, and that kind of thing. Do you know, I hear nothing but praises of him about Arden; and he is really doing wonders for the place. Looking at his work with an unjaundiced mind, it is impossible to deny that. And

then his wealth!—something enormous, they tell me. How do you like the daughter, by the way?'

This question Mr. Lovel asked with something of a wry face, as if the existence of Daniel Granger's daughter was not a pleasing circumstance in his mind.

'Not particularly, papa. She is very good, I daresay, and seems anxious to do good among the poor; and she is clever and accomplished, but she is not a winning person. I don't think I could ever get on with her very well.'

'That's a pity, since you are such near neighbours.'

'But you have always avoided any acquaintance with the Grangers, papa,' Clarissa said wonderingly.

'Yes, yes, naturally. I have shrunk from knowing people who have turned me out of house and home, as it were. But that sort of thing must come to an end sooner or later. I don't want to appear prejudiced or churlish; and in short, though I may never care to cross that threshold, there is no reason Miss Granger and you should not be friendly. You have no one at Arden of your own age to associate with, and a companion of that kind might be useful.

Has the girl much influence with her father, do you think?'

'She is not a girl, papa, she is a young woman. I don't suppose she is more than two- or three-and-twenty, but no one would ever think of calling Miss Granger a girl.'

'You haven't answered my question.'

'I scarcely know how to answer it. Mr. Granger seems kind to his daughter, and she talks as if she had a great deal of influence over him; but one does not see much of people's real feelings in a great house like this. It is "company" all day long. I daresay Mr. and Miss Granger are very fond of one another, but—but—they are not so much to each other as I should like you and me to be, papa,' Clarissa added with a sudden boldness.

Mr. Lovel coughed, as if something had stuck in his throat.

'My dear child, I have every wish to treat you fairly—affectionately, that is to say,' he replied, after that little nervous cough; 'but I am not a man given to sentiment, you see, and there are circumstances in my life which go far to excuse a certain coldness. So long as you do not ask too much of me—in the way of sentiment, I mean—we shall get

on very well, as we have done since your return from school. I have had every reason to be satisfied.'

This was not much, but Clarissa was grateful even for so little.

'Thank you, papa,' she said in a low voice; 'I have been very anxious to please you.'

'Yes, my dear, and I hope—nay am sure—that your future conduct will give me the same cause for satisfaction; that you will act wisely, and settle the more difficult questions of life like a woman of sense and resolution. There are difficult questions to be solved in life, you know, Clary; and woe betide the woman who lets her heart get the better of her head!'

Clarissa did not quite understand the drift of this remark, but her father dismissed the subject in his lightest manner before she could express her bewilderment.

'That's quite enough serious talk, my dear,' he said; 'and now give me the *carte du pays*. Who is here besides these Grangers? and what little social comedies are being enacted? Your letters, though very nice and dutiful, are not quite up to the Horace-Walpole standard, and have not enlightened me much about the state of things.'

Clarissa ran over the names of the Castle guests. There was one which she felt would be difficult to pronounce, but it must needs come at last. She wound up her list with it: 'And—and there are Lady Geraldine Challoner, and the gentleman she is going to marry—Mr. Fairfax.'

To her extreme surprise, the name seemed to awaken some unwonted emotion in her father's breast.

'Fairfax!' he exclaimed; 'what Fairfax is that? You didn't tell me whom Lady Geraldine was to marry when you told me you were to officiate as bridesmaid. Who is this Mr. Fairfax?'

'He has been in the army, papa, and has sold out. He is the heir to some great estate called Lyvedon, which he is to inherit from an uncle.'

'*His* son!' muttered Mr. Lovel.

'Do you know Mr. Fairfax, papa?'

'No, I do not know this young man. But I have known others—members of the same family—and have a good reason for hating his name. He comes of a false unprincipled race. I am sorry for Lady Geraldine.'

'He may not have inherited the faults of his family, papa.'

'May not!' echoed Mr. Lovel contemptuously; 'or may. I fancy these vices run in the blood, child, and pass from father to son more surely than a landed estate. To lie and betray came natural to the man I knew. Great Heaven! I can see his false smile at this moment.'

This was said in a low voice; not to Clarissa, but to himself; a half-involuntary exclamation. He turned impatiently presently, and walked hurriedly back towards the Castle.

'Let us go in,' he said. 'That name of Fairfax has set my teeth on edge.'

'But you will not be uncivil to Mr. Fairfax, papa?' Clarissa asked anxiously.

'Uncivil to him!' No, of course not. The man is Lady Laura's guest, and a stranger to me; why should I be uncivil to him?'

Nor would it have been possible to imagine by and by, when Mr. Lovel and George Fairfax were introduced to each other, that the name of the younger man was in any manner unpleasant to the elder. Clarissa's father had evidently made up his mind to be agreeable, and was eminently successful in the attempt. At the dinner-table he was really brilliant, and it was a wonder to every one that a

man who led a life of seclusion could shine forth all at once with more than the success of a professed diner-out. But it was to Mr. Granger that Marmaduke Lovel was most particularly gracious. He seemed eager to atone, on this one occasion, for all former coldness towards the purchaser of his estate. Nor was Daniel Granger slow to take advantage of his urbane humour. For some reason or other, that gentleman was keenly desirous of acquiring Mr. Lovel's friendship. It might be the commoner's slavish worship of ancient race, it might be some deeper motive, that influenced him, but about the fact itself there could be no doubt. The master of Arden was eager to place his coverts, his park, his library, his hot-houses, his picture-gallery—everything that he possessed—at the feet of his ruined neighbour. Yet even in his eagerness to confer these benefits there was some show of delicacy, and he was careful not to outrage the fallen man's dignity.

Mr. Lovel listened, and bowed, and smiled; pledged himself to nothing; waived off every offer with an airy grace that was all his own. A prime-minister, courted by some wealthy place-hunter, could not have had a loftier air; and yet he contrived to make Mr. Granger feel that this was the inau-

guration of a friendship between them; that he consented to the throwing down of those barriers which had kept them apart hitherto.

'For myself, I am a hermit by profession,' he said; 'but I am anxious that my daughter should have friends, and I do not think she could have a more accomplished or agreeable companion than Miss Granger.'

He glanced towards that young lady with a smile —almost a triumphant smile—as he said this. She had been seated next him at dinner, and he had paid her considerable attention—attention which had not been received by her with quite that air of gratification which Mr. Lovel's graceful compliments were apt to cause. He was not angry with her, however. He contemplated her with a gentle indulgence, as an interesting study in human nature.

'Well, Mr. Lovel,' said Lady Laura in a confidential tone, when he was wishing her good-night, 'what do you think of Mr. Granger now?'

'I think he is a very excellent fellow, my dear Lady Laura; and that I am to blame for having been so prejudiced against him.'

'I am so glad to hear you say that!' cried my lady eagerly. She had drawn him a little way apart

from the rest of her visitors, out of earshot of the animated groups of talkers clustered here and there. 'And now I want to know if you have made any great discovery?' she asked, looking at him triumphantly.

He responded to the look with a most innocent stare.

'A discovery, my dearest Lady Laura—you mystify me. What discovery is there for me to make, except that Hale Castle is the most delightful place to visit?—and that fact I knew beforehand, knowing its mistress.'

'But is it possible that you have seen nothing—guessed nothing? And I should have supposed you such a keen observer—such a profound judge of human nature.'

'One does not enlarge one's knowledge of human nature by being buried amongst books as I have been. But seriously, Lady Laura, what is the answer to the enigma—what ought I to have guessed, or seen?'

'Why, that Daniel Granger is desperately in love with your daughter.'

'With Clarissa! Impossible! Why, the man is old enough to be her father.'

'Now, my dear Mr. Lovel, you know that is *no* reason against it. I tell you the thing is certain—palpable to any one who has had some experience in such matters, as I have. I wanted to bring this about; I had set my heart upon it before Clarissa came here, but I did not think it would be accomplished so easily. There is no doubt about his feelings, my dear Mr. Lovel; I know the man thoroughly, and I never saw him pay any woman attention before. Perhaps the poor fellow is scarcely conscious of his own infatuation yet, but the fact is no less certain.. He has betrayed himself to me ever so many times by little speeches he has let fall about our dear Clary. I think even the daughter begins to see it.'

'And what then, my kind friend?' asked Mr. Lovel with an air of supreme indifference. 'Suppose this fancy of yours to be correct, do you think Clarissa would marry the man?'

'I do not think she would be so foolish as to refuse him,' Lady Laura answered quickly; 'unless there were some previous infatuation on her side.'

'You need have no apprehension of that,' returned Mr. Lovel sharply. 'Clarissa has never had the opportunity for so much as a flirtation.'

Lady Laura remembered that scene in the balcony with a doubtful feeling.

'I hope she would have some regard for her own interest,' she said thoughtfully. 'And if such an opportunity as this were to present itself—as I feel very sure it will—I hope your influence would be exerted on the right side.'

'My dear Lady Laura, my influence should be exercised in any manner you desired,' replied Mr. Lovel eagerly. 'You have been so good to that poor friendless girl, that you have a kind of right to dispose of her fate. Heaven forbid that I should interfere with any plans you may have formed on her behalf, except to promote them.'

'It is so good of you to say that. I really am so fond of my dear Clary, and it would so please me to see her make a great marriage, such as this would be. If Mr. Granger were not a good man, if it were a mere question of money, I would not urge it for a moment; but he really is in every way unexceptionable, and if you will give me your permission to use my influence with Clary—'

'My dear Lady Laura, as a woman, as a mother, you are the fittest judge of what is best for the girl. I leave her in your hands with entire confidence;

and if you bring this marriage about, I shall say Providence has been good to us. Yes, I confess I should like to see my daughter mistress of Arden Court.'

Almost as he spoke, there arose before him a vision of what his own position would be if this thing should come to pass. Was it really worth wishing for at best? Never again could he be master of the home of his forefathers. An honoured visitor perhaps, or a tolerated inmate—that was all. Still, it would be something to have his daughter married to a rich man. He had a growing, almost desperate need of some wealthy friend who should stretch out a saving hand between him and his fast-accumulating difficulties; and who so fitted for this office as a son-in-law? Yes, upon the whole, the thing was worth wishing for.

He bade Lady Laura good-night, declaring that this brief glimpse of the civilised world had been strangely agreeable to him. He even promised to dine at the Castle again before long, and so departed, after kissing his daughter almost affectionately, in a better humour with himself and mankind than had been common to him lately.

'So that is young Fairfax,' he said to himself

as he jogged slowly homeward in the Arden fly, the single vehicle of that kind at the disposal of the village gentility; 'so that is the son of Temple Fairfax. There is a look of his father in his eyes, but not that look of wicked power in his face that there was in the Colonel's—not that thorough stamp of a bold bad man. It will come, I suppose, in good time.'

CHAPTER XVI.

LORD CALDERWOOD IS THE CAUSE OF INCONVENIENCE.

THE preparations for the wedding went on gaily, and whatever inclination to revolt may have lurked in George Fairfax's breast, he made no sign. Since his insolent address that night in the corridor he had scarcely spoken to Clarissa; but he kept a furtive watch upon her notwithstanding, and she knew it, and sickened under it as under an evil influence. He was very angry with her—she was fully conscious of that—unjustifiably, unreasonably angry. More than once, when Mr. Granger was especially attentive, she had encountered a withering glance from those dark gray eyes, and she had been weak enough, wicked enough perhaps, to try and make him perceive that Mr. Granger's attentions were in no way pleasant to her. She could bear anything better than that he should think her capable of courting this man's admiration.

She told herself sometimes that it would be an unspeakable relief to her when the marriage was over, and George Fairfax had gone away from Hale Castle, and out of her life for evermore; and then, while she was trying to believe this, the thought would come to her of what her life would be utterly without him, with no hope of ever seeing him again, with the bitter necessity of remembering him only as Lady Geraldine's husband. She loved him, and knew that she loved him. To hear his voice, to be in the same room with him, caused her a bitter kind of joy, a something that was sweeter than common pleasure, keener than common pain. His presence, were he ever so silent or angry, gave colour to her life, and to realise the dull blankness of a life without him seemed impossible.

While this silent struggle was going on, and the date of the marriage growing nearer and nearer, Mr. Granger's attentions became daily more marked. It was impossible even for Clarissa, preoccupied as she was by those other thoughts, to doubt that he admired her with something more than common admiration. Miss Granger's evident uneasiness and anger were in themselves sufficient to give emphasis to this fact. That young lady, mistress of herself as she

was upon most occasions, found the present state of things too much for her endurance. For the last ten years of her life, ever since she was a precocious damsel of twelve, brought to a premature state of cultivation by an expensive forcing apparatus of governesses and masters, she had been in the habit of assuring herself and her confidantes that her father would never marry again. She had a very keen sense of the importance of wealth, and from that tender age, of twelve or so upwards, she had been fully aware of the diminution her own position would undergo in the event of a second marriage, and the advent of a son to the house of Granger. Governesses and maidservants had perhaps impressed this upon her at some still earlier stage of her existence; but from this time upwards she had needed nothing to remind her of the fact, and she had watched her father with an unwearying vigilance.

More than once, strong-minded and practical as he was, she had seen him in danger. Attractive widows and dashing spinsters had marked him for their prey, and he had seemed not quite adamant; but the hour of peril had passed, and the widow or the spinster had gone her way, with all her munitions of war expended, and Daniel Granger still unscathed.

This time it was very different. Mr. Granger showed an interest in Clarissa which he had never before exhibited in any member of her sex since he wooed and won the first Mrs. Granger; and as his marriage had been by no means a romantic affair, but rather a prudential arrangement made and entered upon by Daniel Granger the elder, cloth-manufacturer of Leeds and Bradford, on the one part, and Thomas Talloway, cotton-spinner of Manchester, on the other part, it is doubtful whether Miss Sophy Talloway had ever in her ante-nuptial days engrossed so much of his attention.

Having no one else at Hale to whom she could venture to unbosom herself, Miss Granger was fain to make a confidante of her maid, although she did not, as a general rule, affect familiarity with servants. This maid, who was a mature damsel of five-and-thirty or upwards, and a most estimable Church-of-England person, had been with Miss Granger for a great many years; had curled her hair for her when she wore it in a crop, and even remembered her in her last edition of pinafores. Some degree of familiarity therefore might be excused, and the formal Sophia would now and then expand a little in her intercourse with Warman.

One night, a very little while before Lady Geraldine's wedding-day, the cautious Warman, while brushing Miss Granger's hair, ventured to suggest that her mistress looked out of spirits. Had she said that Sophia looked excessively cross, she would scarcely have been beside the mark.

'Well, Warman,' Miss Granger replied, in rather a shrewish tone, 'I *am* out of spirits. I have been very much annoyed this evening by papa's attentions to—by the designing conduct of a young lady here.'

'I think I can guess who the young lady is, miss,' Warman answered shrewdly.

'O, I suppose so,' cried Sophia, giving her head an angry jerk which almost sent the brush out of her abigail's hand; 'servants know everything.'

'Well, you see, miss, servants have eyes and ears, and they can't very well help using them. People think we're inquisitive and prying if we venture to see things going on under our very noses; and so hypocrisy gets to be almost part of a servant's education, and what people call a good servant is a smooth-faced creature that pretends to see nothing and to understand nothing. But my principles won't allow of my stooping to that sort of thing, Miss Granger, and what I think I say. I know my duty

as a servant, and I know the value of my own immortal soul as a human being.'

'How you do preach, Warman! Who wants you to be a hypocrite?' exclaimed Sophia impatiently. 'It's always provoking to hear that one's affairs have been talked over by a herd of servants, but I suppose it's inevitable. And pray, what have they been saying about papa?'

'Well, miss, I've heard a good deal of talk of one kind and another. You see, your papa is looked upon as a great gentleman in the county, and people will talk about him. There's Norris, Lady Laura's own footman, who's a good deal in the drawing-room —really a very intelligent well-brought-up young man, and, I am happy to say, *not* a dissenter. Norris takes a good deal of notice of what's going on, and he has made a good many remarks upon your par's attention to Miss Lovel. Looking at the position of the parties, you see, miss, it would be such a curious thing if it was to be brought round for that young lady to be mistress of Arden Court.'

'Good gracious me, Warman!' cried Sophia aghast, 'you don't suppose that papa would marry again?'

'Well, I can't really say, miss. But when a gentleman of your par's age pays so much attention to a

lady young enough to be his daughter, it generally do end that way.'

There was evidently no consolation to be obtained from Warman, nor was that astute handmaiden to be betrayed into any expression of opinion against Miss Lovel. It seemed to her more than probable that Clarissa Lovel might come before long to reign over the household at Arden, and the all-powerful Sophia sink to a minor position. Strong language of any kind was therefore likely to be dangerous. Hannah Warman valued her place, which was a good one, and would perhaps be still better under a more impulsive and generous mistress. The safest thing therefore was to close the conversation with one of those pious platitudes which Warman had always at her command.

'Whatever may happen, miss, we are in the hands of Providence,' she said solemnly; 'and let us trust that things will be so regulated as to work for the good of our immortal souls. No one can go through life without trials, miss, and perhaps yours may be coming upon you now; but we know that such chastisements are intended for our benefit.'

Sophia Granger had encouraged this kind of talk from the lips of Warman, and other humble disciples,

too often to be able to object to it just now; but her temper was by no means improved by this conversation, and she dismissed her maid presently with a very cool good-night.

On the third day before the wedding, George Fairfax's mother arrived at the Castle, in order to assist in this important event in her son's life. Clarissa contemplated this lady with a peculiar interest, and was not a little wounded by the strange coldness with which Mrs. Fairfax greeted her upon her being introduced by Lady Laura to the new arrival. This coldness was all the more striking on account of the perfect urbanity of Mrs. Fairfax's manners in a general way, and a certain winning gentleness which distinguished her on most occasions. It seemed to Clarissa as if she recoiled with something like aversion at the sound of her name.

'Miss Lovel of Arden Court, I believe?' she said, looking at Lady Laura.

'Yes; my dear Clarissa is the only daughter of the gentleman who till lately was owner of Arden Court. It has passed into other hands now.'

'I beg your pardon. I did not know there had been any change.'

And then Mrs. Fairfax continued her previous conversation with Lady Laura, as if anxious to have done with the subject of Miss Lovel.

Nor in the three days before the wedding did she take any farther notice of Clarissa; a neglect the girl felt keenly; all the more so because she was interested in spite of herself in this pale faded lady of fifty, who still bore the traces of great beauty, and who carried herself with the grace of a queen. She had that air *du faubourg* which we hear of in the great ladies of a departed era in Parisian society,—a serene and tranquil elegance which never tries to be elegant, a perfect self-possession which never degenerates into insolence.

In a party so large as that now assembled at Hale, this tacit avoidance of one person could scarcely be called a rudeness. It might so easily be accidental. Clarissa felt it nevertheless, and felt somehow that it was not accidental. Though she could never be anything to George Fairfax, though all possibility even of friendship was at an end between them, she would have liked to gain his mother's regard. It was an idle wish perhaps, but scarcely an unnatural one.

She watched Mrs. Fairfax and Lady Geraldine

together. The affection between those two was very evident. Never did the younger lady appear to greater advantage than in her intercourse with her future mother-in-law. All pride and coldness vanished in that society, and Geraldine Challoner became genial and womanly.

'She has played her cards well,' Barbara Fermor said maliciously. 'It is the mother who has brought about this marriage.'

If Mrs. Fairfax showed herself coldly disposed towards Clarissa, there was plenty of warmth on the parts of the Ladies Emily and Louisa Challoner, who arrived at the Castle about the same time, and at once took a fancy to their sister's protégée.

'Laura has told us so much about you, Miss Lovel,' said Lady Louisa, 'and we mean to be very fond of you, if you will allow us; and, O, please may we call you Clarissa? It is such a *sweet* name!'

Both these ladies had passed that fearful turning-point in woman's life, her thirtieth birthday, and had become only more gushing and enthusiastic with increasing years. They were very much like Lady Laura, had all her easy goodnature and liveliness, and were more or less afraid of the stately Geraldine.

'Do you know, we are quite glad she is going to

be married at last,' Lady Emily said in a confidential tone to Clarissa; 'for she has kept up a kind of frigid atmosphere at home that I really believe has helped to frighten away all our admirers. Men of the present day don't like that kind of thing. It went out of fashion in England with King Charles I., I think, and in France with Louis XIV. You know how badly the royal household behaved coming home from his funeral, laughing and talking and all that: I believe it arose from their relief at thinking that the king of forms and ceremonies was dead. We always have our nicest little parties—kettledrums, and suppers after the opera, and that sort of thing—when Geraldine is away; for we can do anything with papa.'

The great day came, and the heavens were propitious. A fine clear September day, with a cool wind and a warm sun: a day upon which the diaphanous costumes of the bridesmaids might be a shade too airy; but not a stern or cruel day, to tinge their young noses with a frosty hue, or blow the crinkles out of their luxuriant hair.

The bridesmaids were the Ladies Emily and Louisa Challoner, the two Miss Fermors, Miss Granger, and Clarissa—six in all; a moderation which

Lady Laura was inclined to boast of as a kind of Spartan simplicity. They were all to be dressed alike, in white, with bonnets that seemed composed of waxen-looking white heather and tremulous harebells, and with blue sashes to match the harebells. The dresses were Lady Laura's inspiration: they had come to her almost in her sleep, she declared, when she had well-nigh despaired of realising her vague desires; and Clarissa's costume was, like the ball-dress, a present from her benefactress.

The nine-o'clock breakfast—a meal that began at nine and rarely ended till eleven—was hurried over in the most uncomfortable and desultory manner on this eventful morning. The principals in the great drama did not appear at all, and Clarissa and Miss Granger were the only two bridesmaids who could spare half an hour from the cares of the toilet. The rest breakfasted in the seclusion of their several apartments, with their hair in crimping-pins. Miss Granger was too perfect a being to crinkle her hair, or to waste three hours on dressing, even for a wedding. Lady Laura showed herself among her guests, for a quarter of an hour or so, in a semi-hysterical flutter; *so* anxious that everything should go off well, *so* fearful that something might happen, she knew

not what, to throw the machinery of her arrangements out of gear.

'I suppose it's only a natural feeling on such an occasion as this,' she said, 'but I really do feel as if something were going to happen. Things have gone on so smoothly up to this morning—no disappointments from milliners, no stupid mistakes on the part of those railway people—everything has gone upon velvet; and now it is coming to the crisis I am quite nervous.'

Of course every one declared that this was perfectly natural, and recommended his or her favourite specific—a few drops of sal-volatile—a liqueur-glass of dry curaçoa—red lavender—chlorodyne—and so on; and then Lady Laura laughed and called herself absurd, and hurried away to array herself in a pearl-coloured silk, half smothered by puffings of pale pink areophane and Brussels-lace flounces; a dress that was all pearly gray and rose and white, like the sky at early morning.

Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Granger, with some military men and country squires, took their breakfast as calmly as if a wedding were part of the daily business of life. Miss Granger exhibited a polite indifference about the great event; Miss Lovel was pale and ner-

vous, not able to give much attention to Daniel Granger, who had contrived to sit next her that morning, and talked to her a good deal, with an apparent unconsciousness of the severe gaze of his daughter, seated exactly opposite to him.

Clarissa was glad to make her toilet an excuse for leaving Mr. Granger; but once in the sanctuary of her own room, she sat down in an absent manner, and made no attempt to begin dressing. Fosset, the maid, found her there at a quarter past ten o'clock—the ceremony was to take place at eleven—and gave a cry of horror at seeing the toilet uncommenced.

'Good gracious me, miss! what have you been thinking of? Your hair not begun nor nothing! I've been almost torn to bits with one and another—Miss Fermor's maid bothering for long hair-pins and narrow black ribbon; and Jane Roberts—Lady Emily Challoner's maid—who really never has anything handy, wanting half the things out of my work-box—or I should have been with you ever so long ago. My lady would be in a fine way if you were late.'

'I think my hair will do very well as it is, Fosset,' Clarissa said listlessly.

'Lor, no, miss; not in that dowdy style. It don't half show it off.'

Clarissa seated herself before the dressing-table with an air of resignation rather than interest, and the expeditious Fosset began her work. It was done very speedily—that wealth of hair was so easy to dress; there was no artful manipulation of long hair-pins and black ribbon needed to unite borrowed tresses with real ones. The dress was put on, and Clarissa was invited to look at herself in the cheval-glass.

'I do wish you had a bit more colour in your cheeks to-day, miss,' Fosset said, with rather a vexed air. 'Not that I'd recommend you any of their vinegar rouges, or ineffaceable blooms, or anything of that kind. But I don't think I ever saw you look so pale. One would think *you* were going to be married, instead of Lady Geraldine. *She's* as cool as a cucumber this morning, Sarah Thompson told me just now. You can't put *her* out easily.'

The carriages were driving up to the great door by this time. It was about twenty minutes to eleven, and in ten minutes more the procession would be starting. Hale church was within five minutes' drive of the Castle.

Clarissa went fluttering down to the drawing-room, where she supposed people would assemble. There

was no one there but Mr. Granger, who was stalking up and down the spacious room, dressed in the newest and stiffest of coats and waistcoats, and looking as if he were going to assist at a private hanging. Miss Lovel felt almost inclined to run away at sight of him. The man seemed to pursue her somehow; and since that night when George Fairfax had offered her his mocking congratulations, Mr. Granger's attentions had been particularly repugnant to her.

She could not draw back, however, without positive rudeness, and it was only a question of five minutes; so she went in and entered upon an interesting little conversation about the weather. It was still fine; there was no appearance of rain; a most auspicious day, really; and so on,—from Mr. Granger; to which novel remarks Clarissa assented meekly.

'There are people who attach a good deal of significance to that kind of thing,' he said presently. 'For my own part, if I were going to be married to the woman I loved, I should care little how black the sky above us might be. That sounds rather romantic for me, doesn't it? A man of fifty has no right to feel like that.'

This he said with a half-bitter laugh. Clarissa

was spared the trouble of answering by the entrance of more bridesmaids—Lady Louisa Challoner and Miss Granger—with three of the military men, who wore hothouse flowers in their button-holes, and were altogether arrayed like the lilies of the field, but who had rather the air of considering this marriage business a tiresome interruption to the partridge-shooting.

'I suppose we are going to start directly,' cried Lady Louisa, who was a fluttering creature of three-and-thirty, always eager to flit from one scene to another. 'If we don't, I really think we shall be late—and there is some dreadful law, isn't there, to prevent people being married after eleven o'clock?'

'After twelve,' Mr. Granger answered in his matter-of-fact way. 'Lady Geraldine has ample margin for delay.'

'But why not after twelve?' asked Lady Louisa with a childish air; 'why not in the afternoon or evening, if one liked? What can be the use of such a ridiculous law? One might as well live in Russia.'

She fluttered to one of the windows and looked out.

'There are all the carriages. How well the men look! Laura must have spent a fortune in white ribbon and gloves for them—and the horses, dear

things!'—a woman of Lady Louisa's stamp is generally enthusiastic about horses, it is such a safe thing—'they look as if they knew it was a wedding. O, good gracious!'

'What is the matter, Lady Louisa?'

'A man from the railway—with a telegram—yes, I am sure it's a telegram! Do you know, I have such a horror of telegrams! I always fancy they mean illness—or death—or something dreadful. Very absurd of me, isn't it? And I daresay this is only a message about some delayed parcel, or some one who was to be here and can't come, or something of that kind.'

The room was full of idle people by this time. Every one went to the open window and stared down at the man who had brought the telegram. He had given his message, and was standing on the broad flight of steps before the Castle door, waiting for the return of the official who had taken it. Whether the electric wires had brought the tidings of some great calamity, or a milliner's apology for a delayed bonnet, was impossible to guess. The messenger stood there stolid and impenetrable, and there was nothing to be divined from his aspect.

But presently, while a vague anxiety possessed

almost every one present, there came from the staircase without a sudden cry of woe—a woman's shriek, long and shrill, ominous as the wail of the banshee. There was a rush to the door, and the women crowded out in a distracted way. Lady Laura was fainting in her husband's arms, and George Fairfax was standing near her reading a telegram.

People had not long to wait for the evil news. Lord Calderwood had been seized with a paralytic stroke—his third attack—at ten o'clock the previous night, and had expired at half-past eight that morning. There could be no wedding that day—nor for many days and weeks to come.

'O, Geraldine, my poor Geraldine, let me go to her!' cried Lady Laura, disengaging herself from her husband's arms and rushing upstairs. Mr. Armstrong hurried after her.

'Laura, my sweet girl, don't agitate yourself; consider yourself,' he cried, and followed, with Lady Louisa sobbing and wailing behind him. Geraldine had not left her room yet. The ill news was to find her on the threshold, calm and lovely in the splendour of her bridal dress.

CHAPTER XVII.

'TIS DEEPEST WINTER IN LORD TIMON'S PURSE.'

BEFORE nightfall—before the evening which was to have been enlivened by a dinner-party and a carpet-dance, and while bride and bridegroom should have been speeding southwards to that noble Kentish mansion which his uncle had lent George Fairfax—before the rooks flew homeward across the woods beyond Hale—there had been a general flight from the Castle. People were anxious to leave the mourners alone with their grief, and even the most intimate felt more or less in the way, though Mr. Armstrong entreated that there might be no hurry, no inconvenience for any one.

'Poor Laura won't be fit to be seen for a day or two,' he said, 'and of course I shall have to go up to town for the funeral; but that need make no difference. Hale is large enough for every one, and it will

be a comfort to her by and by to find her friends round her.'

Through all that dreary day Lady Laura wandered about her morning-room, alternately sobbing and talking of her father to those chosen friends with whom she held little interviews.

Her sisters Louisa and Emily were with her for the greater part of the time, echoing her lamentations like a feeble chorus. Geraldine kept her room, and would see no one—not even him who was to have been her bridegroom, and who might have supposed that he had the chiefest right to console her in this sudden affliction.

Clarissa spent more than an hour with Lady Laura, listening with a tender interest to her praises of the departed. It seemed as if no elderly nobleman—more or less impecunious for the last twenty years of his life—had ever supported such a load of virtues as Lord Calderwood had carried with him to the grave. To praise him inordinately was the only consolation his three daughters could find in the first fervour of their grief. Time was when they had been apt to confess to one another that papa was occasionally rather 'trying,' a vague expression which scarcely involved a lapse of filial duty on the part of the

grumbler. But to hear them to-day one would have supposed that they had never been tried; that life with Lord Calderwood in a small house in Chapel-street, Mayfair, had been altogether a halcyon existence.

Clarissa listened reverently, believing implicitly in the merits of the newly lost, and did her best to console her kind friend during the hour Mr. Armstrong allowed her to spend with Lady Laura. At the end of that time he came and solemnly fetched her away, after a pathetic farewell.

'You must come to me again, Clary, and very, very soon,' said my lady, embracing her. 'I only wish Fred would let you stay with me now. You would be a great comfort.'

'My dearest Lady Laura, it is better not. You have your sisters.'

'Yes, they are very good; but I wanted you to stay, Clary. I had such plans for you. O, by the bye, the Grangers will be going back to-day, I suppose. Why should they not take you with them in their great travelling carriage?—Frederick, will you arrange for the Grangers to take Clarissa home?' cried Lady Laura to her husband, who was hovering near the door. In the midst of her grief my lady

brightened a little with the idea of managing something, even so small a matter as this.

'Of course, my dear,' replied the affectionate Fred. 'Granger shall take Miss Lovel home. And now I must positively hurry her away; all this talk and excitement is so bad for you.'

'I must see the Fermors before they go. You'll let me see the Fermors, Fred?'

'Well, well, I'll bring them just to say good-bye —that's all.—Come along, Miss Lovel.'

Clarissa followed him through the corridor.

'O, if you please, Mr. Armstrong,' she said, 'I did not like to worry Lady Laura, but I would so much rather go home alone in a fly.'

'Nonsense! the Grangers can take you. You could have Laura's brougham, of course; but if she wants you to go with the Grangers, you must go. Her word is law; and she's sure to ask me about it by and by. She's a wonderful woman; thinks of everything.'

They met Mr. and Miss Granger presently, dressed for the journey.

'O, if you please, Granger, I want you to take Miss Lovel home in your carriage. You've plenty of room, I know.'

Sophia looked as if she would have liked to say that there was no room, but her father's face quite flushed with pleasure.

'I shall be only too happy,' he said, 'if Miss Lovel will trust herself to our care.'

'And perhaps you'll explain to her father what has happened, and how sorry we are to lose her, and so on.'

'Certainly, my dear Armstrong. I shall make a point of seeing Mr. Lovel in order to do so.'

So Clarissa had a seat in Mr. Granger's luxurious carriage, the proprietor whereof sat opposite to her, admiring the pale patrician face, and wondering a little what that charm was which made it seem to him more beautiful than any other countenance he had ever looked upon. They did not talk much, Mr. Granger only making a few stereotyped remarks about the uncertainties of this life, or occasionally pointing out some feature of the landscape to Clarissa. The horses went at a splendid pace. Their owner would have preferred a slower transit.

'Remember, Miss Lovel,' he said, as they approached the village of Arden, 'you have promised to come and see us.'

'You are very good; but I go out so little, and papa is always averse to my visiting.'

'But he can't be that any more after allowing you to stay at the Castle, or he will offend commoner folks, like Sophy and me, by his exclusiveness. Besides, he told me he wished Sophy and you to be good friends. I am sure he will let you come to us. When shall it be? Shall we say to-morrow, before luncheon —at twelve or one, say? I will show you what I've done for the house in the morning, and Sophy can take you over her schools and cottages in the afternoon.'

Sophia Granger made no attempt to second this proposition; but her father was so eager and decisive, that it seemed quite impossible for Clarissa to say no.

'If papa will let me come,' she said doubtfully.

'O, I'm quite sure he will not refuse, after what he was good enough to say to me,' replied Mr. Granger; 'and if he does not feel equal to going about with us in the morning, I hope we shall be able to persuade him to come to dinner.'

They were at the little rustic gate before Mill Cottage by this time. How small the place looked after Hale Castle! but not without a prettiness of its own. The virginia creeper was reddening on the wall; the casement windows open to the air and sunshine.

Ponto ran out directly the gate was opened—first to bark at the carriage, and then to leap joyously about Clarissa, overpowering her with a fond canine welcome.

'You'll come in with us, Sophia?' asked Mr. Granger, when he had alighted, and handed Clarissa out of the carriage.

'I think not, papa. You can't want me; and this dreadful morning has given me a wretched headache.'

'I thought there was something amiss. It would be more respectful to Mr. Lovel for you to come in. I daresay he'll excuse you, however, when he hears you are ill.'

Clarissa held out her hand, which Miss Granger took with an almost obvious reluctance, and the two young ladies said 'Good-bye' to each other, without a word from Sophia about the engagement for the next day.

They found Mr. Lovel in his favourite sitting-room; not dreaming over a Greek play or a volume of Bentley, as it was his custom to do, but seriously engaged with a number of open letters and papers scattered on the writing-table before him—papers that looked alarmingly like tradesmen's bills. He was taken by surprise on the entrance of Clarissa and her

companion, and swept the papers into an open drawer with rather a nervous hand.

'My dear Clarissa, this is quite unexpected!—How do you do, Mr. Granger? How very good of you to bring my little girl over to see me! Will you take that chair by the window? I was deep in a file of accounts when you came in. A man must examine his affairs sometimes, however small his household may be.—Well, Clary, what news of our kind friends at the Castle? Why, bless my soul, this is the wedding-day, isn't it? I had quite forgotten the date. Has anything happened?'

'Yes, papa; there has been a great misfortune, and the wedding is put off.'

Between them, Mr. Granger and Clarissa explained the state of affairs at the Castle. Mr. Lovel seemed really shocked by the intelligence of the Earl's death.

'Poor Calderwood! He and I were great friends thirty years ago. I suppose it's nearly twenty since I last saw him. He was one of the handsomest men I ever knew—Lady Geraldine takes after him—and when he was in the diplomatic service had really a very brilliant career before him; but he missed it somehow. Had always rather a frivolous mind, I fancy,

and a want of perseverance. Poor Calderwood! And so he is gone! How old could he have been? Not much over sixty, I believe. I'll look into Debrett presently.'

As soon as he could decently do so after this, Mr. Granger urged his invitation for the next day.

'O, certainly, by all means. Clary shall come to you as early as you like. It will be a great relief for her from the dulness of this place. And—well—yes, if you insist upon it, I'll join you at dinner. But you see what a perfect recluse I am. There will be no one else, I suppose?'

'You have only to say that you wish it, and there shall be no one else,' Mr. Granger replied courteously.

Never had he been so anxious to propitiate any one. People had courted him more or less all his life; and here he was almost suing for the acquaintance of this broken-down spendthrift—a man whom he had secretly despised until now.

On this assurance Mr. Lovel consented to dine with his neighbour for the first time; and Mr. Granger, having no excuse for farther lingering, took his departure, remembering all at once that he had such a thing as a daughter waiting for him in the carriage outside.

He went, and Clarissa took up the thread of her old life just where she had dropped it. Her father was by no means so gracious or agreeable to-day as he had been during his brief visit to Hale Castle. He took out his tradesmen's letters and bills when Mr. Granger was gone, and went on with his examination of them, groaning aloud now and then, or sometimes stopping to rest his head on his hands with a dreary long-drawn sigh. Clarissa would have been very glad to offer her sympathy, to utter some word of comfort; but there was something in her father's aspect which forbade any injudicious approach. She sat by the open window with a book in her hand, but not reading, waiting patiently in the hope that he would share his troubles with her by and by.

He went on with his work for about an hour, and then tied the papers in a bundle with an impatient air.

'Arithmetic is no use in such a case as mine,' he said; 'no man can make fifty pounds pay a hundred. I suppose it must end in the bankruptcy court. It will be only our last humiliation, the culminating disgrace.'

'The bankruptcy court! O, papa!' cried Clarissa piteously.

She had a very vague idea as to what bankruptcy meant, but felt that it was something unutterably shameful—the next thing to a criminal offence.

'Better men than I have gone through it,' Mr. Lovel went on with a sigh, and without the faintest notice of his daughter's dismay; 'but I couldn't stand Arden and Holborough after that degradation. I must go abroad, to some dull old town in the south of France, where I could have my books and decent wine, and where, as regards everything else, I should be in a living grave.'

'But they would never make you bankrupt surely, papa!' Clarissa exclaimed in the same piteous tone.

'*They* would never make me bankrupt!' echoed her father fretfully. 'What do you mean by *they?* You talk like a baby, Clarissa. Do you suppose that tradesmen and bankers and bill-discounters would have more mercy upon me than upon other people? They may give me more time than they would give another man, perhaps, because they know I have some pride of race, and would coin my heart's blood rather than adopt expedients that other men make light of; but when they know there is no more to be got out of me, they will do their worst. It is only a question of time.'

'Are you very much in debt, papa?' Clarissa asked timidly, anticipating a rebuff.

'No; that is the most confounded part of the business. My liabilities only amount to a few pitiful hundreds. When I sold Arden—and I did not do that till I was obliged, you may believe—the bulk of the purchase-money went to the mortgagees. With the residue—a paltry sum—I bought myself an annuity; a transaction which I was able to conclude upon better terms than most men of my age, on account of my precarious health, and to which I was most strongly urged by my legal advisers. On this I have existed, or tried to exist, ever since; but the income has not been sufficient even for the maintenance of this narrow household; if I lived in a garret, I must live like a gentleman, and should be always at the mercy of my servants. These are honest enough, I daresay, but I have no power of checking my expenditure. And then I had your schooling to pay for—no small amount, I assure you.'

'Thank heaven that is over, papa! And now, if you would only let me go out as a governess, I might be some help to you instead of a burden.'

'There's time enough to think of that. You are

not much of a burden to me at present. I don't suppose you add many pounds a year to the expenses of this house. And if I have to face the inevitable, and see my name in the *Gazette*, we must begin life again upon a smaller scale, and in a cheaper place—some out-of-the-way corner of France or Belgium. The governess notion will keep till I am dead. You can always be of some use to me as a companion, if you choose.'

This was quite a concession. Clarissa came over to her father's chair, and laid her hand caressingly upon his shoulder.

'My dear father,' she said in a low sweet voice, 'you make me almost happy, in spite of our troubles. I wish for nothing better than to stay with you always. And by and by, if we have to live abroad, where you need not be so particular about our name, I may be able to help you a little—by means of art or music—without leaving home. I think I could be happy anywhere with you, papa, if you would only love me a little.'

That appeal touched a heart not easily moved. Marmaduke Lovel put his hand—such a slender feminine hand—into his daughter's with an affectionate pressure.

'Poor child!' he said sadly. 'It would be hard if I couldn't love you a little. But you were born under an evil star, Clarissa; and hitherto perhaps I have tried to shut my heart against you. I won't do that any more. Whatever affection is in me to give shall be yours. God knows I have no reason to withhold it, nor any other creature on this earth on whom to bestow it. God knows it is a new thing for me to have my love sued for.'

There was a melancholy in his tone which touched his daughter deeply. He seemed to have struck the key-note of his life in those few words; a disappointed unsuccessful life; a youth in which there had been some hidden cause for the ungenial temper of his middle age.

It was nearly six o'clock by this time, and Clarissa strolled into the garden with her father while the table was being laid for dinner. There were faint glimpses of russet here and there among the woods around Arden Court, but it still seemed summer time. The late roses were in full bloom in Mr. Lovel's fertile garden, the rosy apples were brightening in the orchard, the plums purpling on a crumbling old red-brick wall that bounded the narrow patch of kitchen-garden. Yes, even after Hale Castle the

place seemed pretty; and a pang went through Clarissa's heart, as she thought that this too they might have to leave; even this humble home was not secure to them.

Father and daughter dined together very pleasantly. Clarissa had been made almost happy by her father's unwonted tenderness, and Mr. Lovel was in tolerable spirits, in spite of that dreary afternoon's labour, that hopeless task of trying to find out some elastic quality in pounds, shillings, and pence.

END OF VOL. I.

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